

# First Sunday after Christmas Day

26.12.2021  
By Ruth Harvey

## Introduction

This passage orientates us around the deep home that we find in faith, and points to the truth that in the face of turmoil – such as that caused by losing sight of a child –we can nevertheless find solace in the stillness at the centre of chaos. Through the lens of conflict transformation, what does this text teach about the power of assumption, and of intent?

---

## Text

Luke 2:41–52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

---

## Comment

Reading this text, I would normally focus on themes of anxiety and loss (Mary and Joseph) followed by themes of insight and wisdom (Jesus in the Temple). In the

context of the period of the nativity, I would look to the delight and joy of finding a deep home in faith.

Picking up on just one of these themes provides deep food for thought. Losing sight of a child in a large crowd, not finding them for hours, maybe days, must be one of the most gut-wrenchingly horrendous experiences as a parent. Recent news stories in the press remind us of the vulnerability of children lost to the sight of responsible adults, left to fend for themselves. These stories don't always end well. So the 'great anxiety' and fear experienced by Mary and Joseph is palpable. It stands in stark contrast to the calmness with which the twelve-year-old Jesus speaks. There is much to explore here.

Reading this text through the lens of conflict transformation however, I see two additional themes: 1) the power of assumption and 2) the notion of intent.

In my work in conflict transformation with Place for Hope, I have noticed over the years the impact that assumptions can have. Arriving at a mediation with our minds already made up about the outcome, or turning up for a tricky conversation with a blind-spot about the perceived views of the 'other', can mean that reaching through the depth of the conflict to transformation can take a while.

Picture an iceberg. What is presented on the surface (the 'positions' we adopt) can dominate our perspective on a situation such that we ignore the deep and dynamic passions (the 'interests' or 'feelings' or 'tone' or 'mood') that are often a much stronger driving force lying largely invisible beneath the surface.

It is on the surface that our assumptions also rest – perceptions, or 'positions' that we accept as given, beyond question. And there is the clue: 'beyond question'. One of my wisest guides in the field of conflict transformation, Charlie Irvine, coached us always as mediators to 'remain curious' – to find good questions, pose deep enquiries, name our curiosity. And then to listen deeply to the answers, with the intention of being changed.

In this passage, notwithstanding the guttural devastation of losing sight of a child, Mary and Joseph experienced this time of loss as 'deep anxiety', assuming the worst. As I write, I find it hard to reconcile myself to this 'reading' of the Gospel – my inner parent is saying, 'of course they were *right* to be anxious, furious even with the unthinking child who had given his parents not a second thought'. And yet if I am to look at this text through the lens of conflict transformation, then I cannot ignore an alternative reading – that there are multiple ways to read the text, many truths to glean from the passage.

And what of intent? I have been reading recently about the 'negativity bias' – the notion that negative feelings or responses are often amplified, thrown out of proportion to positive ones. This has deep roots in our survival instinct. And yet an over-developed negativity bias can mask the deep, powerful, positive intent that most people, most of the time, display.

---

## Response

- Consider times when you have approached a difficult conversation with assumptions about the 'other'. How easy is it to empty your heart or mind of all assumptions?
- Practice the art of listening with the intention of being

changed – which will mean putting your assumptions and responses to one side while you listen deeply to the ‘other’.

- In which contexts (home, work, faith–community) do you notice the ‘negativity bias’ at play? What is your response?
- 

## Prayer

God of solace and comfort,  
in whom we find our deep home,  
still our beating hearts in the face of ‘deep anxiety’.  
Remind us of the goodness in each person,  
planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

God of solace and comfort,  
strengthen our trust in the ‘other’  
not by blinding us to danger or threat,  
but by reminding us that  
you love even those whom  
we perceive as our deepest enemy.

God of solace and comfort,  
bring peace to our souls  
as we navigate our way through the stories of your birth and childhood  
and so find in them a message  
of hope, truth and light for now  
and forevermore,  
Amen.

---

## Further Reading

Here is one of the many [articles explaining ‘The Negativity Bias.’](#)

Search [Hay and Stardust: resources for Christmas to Candlemas](#) for further inspiration for this season of the Christian year.