



Sermon Text: Luke 2:41-52

Contextualized in the story of former refugee Claudette Nshimiyimana

Deaconess Pamela Nielsen, LCMS Communications

She was lost and scared. Her world collapsed around her. On April 12, 1994, a grenade hit Claudette Nshimiyimana's home in Rwanda and literally fragmented her life. Her brothers and sisters scattered. It would take days for her mother to find and gather together her siblings. One was never found.

Can you imagine the gut-wrenching terror felt by a mother who cannot find her children? Can you grasp the desperation felt as the hours and days go by as a mother is unable to hold and help her own? Can you feel the fear and hear the prayers uttered out of longing for a child?

Most people know Luke 2 as the chapter that records the Christmas story. We probably know the King James Version in our heads as the traditional translation of that beloved story. But at the end of Luke 2, we find another story many know well: the only one of Jesus before He became an adult.

When Jesus was twelve years old, his family went to Jerusalem as they did every year to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. . But on this particular trip, according to the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary started the long walk home, assuming Jesus was among the family and friends heading back north. But when it became apparent that Jesus wasn't with them, His parents started searching. Searching for Jesus. Searching for their son. He has never disobeyed before. What could have happened?

When Claudette, a refugee from Rwanda, recounts her experience, she says, "As we all fled, I remember thinking and seeing just how important the children

were to the parents. Papers, jewelry, furniture or televisions weren't important any longer. It was the children and how to keep them safe and secure that was on the forefront of the parents' minds. My mother was no different. Eventually, after many long days of walking, we made it to the refugee camp in the Congo. The conditions of the camp were difficult and what I remember is that everyone was trying to survive by any means necessary."

How to keep the children safe trumped all other concerns. Material things we desire pale in comparison with keeping our loved ones safe, especially our children. We forsake everything to gather the children and bring them home, even when home is destroyed.

Luke's reason for recording this event was not the fact that Jesus didn't go with His parents. It isn't the wonder of a mother and father desperate to find. It was Jesus' response once He was found: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

But the word "house" is not in the Greek text. Jesus is about the things of the Father. He is the beloved Son of God, and so He lives, dies, and rises in perfect obedience to the Father. His Father. God the Father. In a world in which we cannot control things, we need a Father. We need a loving Father who is able to protect us and to provide for us. We need a Father who loves us. We need Jesus' Father. But instead, we turn away from our Father and don't know the way home. We are lost in our sin. Our sin leads us to seek refuge in ourselves and the things of this world.

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In Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories about finding people who are lost. In Luke 19:10, Jesus says that He came to seek and to save the lost. And where does He bring them when they are found? He brings them home, to His Father's house, where His Father's business is all that is done.

For many and various reasons, refugees cannot live in their previous homes. They seek refuge, and they seek love. They seek protection, shelter, and a home.

Needs of shelter, clothing, food and family are easy to identify. Material needs are apparent and immediate. Yet the refuge that we all need is one that none of us seek. The refuge we need is found in our Father's house, from which our sin and our self-love teach us to flee. God is our refuge and strength. He is our ever-present help in trouble. And His house is our true home.

Claudette's story continues, "What was most difficult for me at seven years old was that there was no longer access to an education. I wanted so badly to learn, but it wasn't possible in the camp. However, in 2002, my mother moved my family to the neighboring country of Zambia in hopes of providing us with a safer environment and access to a school, something she valued deeply.

Then in 2006, twelve years after we had fled our home in Rwanda, we were given the opportunity to resettle as refugees in the state of Rhode Island. We knew that being a refugee in a new country like the United States was not going to be easy, but my mother had one very important goal for her children: to continue our

education. So when we arrived in July 2016, my mother insisted that my sister and I begin school as soon as possible. We were able to enroll in a community college in Rhode Island.

I soon found out that the Rwandan community in Providence, RI was also in need of help so my sister and I studied and worked to start an afterschool program for refugee children. The program my sister and I created provides supplemental tutoring in order to help new refugee children succeed in schools here in the United States. We mentor the children and try to encourage them to set goals for their new lives and new futures. Resettlement in the U.S. was a second chance at life for us. Our hopes were renewed and opportunities for success were opened up."

We seek to offer refuge to those who need it, just as Jesus taught that all might find refuge in His Father's house. Those who believe in the Son are welcome into the Father's eternal home: the empty tomb of Jesus, the fellowship of believers, the cross of our Savior, and, finally, His eternal Kingdom.

The Father's house is now the place for all nations and peoples. Jesus' death and resurrection was for the whole. He paid for the sins of every person in every nation. All who take refuge in Him are welcomed into the Father's house. Drawn by the Spirit to trust in Christ as our Savior and our brother, we are welcomed because of the Father's Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

In addition to the Father's house as our refuge in Christ, we live as citizens of this nation. People come here to



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seek refuge from political, social, economic, and various other struggles. The Church can work to show refugees and immigrants the love of the Father and His Son, that the Father's house is open to them through the work of Christ on the cross. Repentance and forgiveness is proclaimed to all people, regardless of their reasons for coming to our nation.

And as we proclaim, we love. We serve the people who come by providing physical shelter and services. We embody the love of God for all people as we live out our conviction that all people belong to the loving Creator. And we therefore seek to provide physical refuge to all as we are able.

Claudette – and many in her situation – seek a place to live, food, clothing, and education, while we live in a country with these resources in abundance.

As we live out the business of our heavenly Father, we love as He loves. He loves the world, He loves His

creatures. He loves each person, for whom He sent His Son. This is our Father. And His Son, our brother, loves. He is consumed with the things of His Father. Where else would you expect to find Jesus?

Jesus, as the Son of God is about the business of the Father. Jesus, as the Son of God loves with His life. He died for you. He rose for you. Your sins have been paid for. Eternal life is freely won for you. You have refuge in God, in the heavenly Father and in His Son, your Savior.

We love because it is the business of the Father. Jesus came to seek and to save. We love any and all in our lives with that love. The love of the Father. That love may be in food. It may be in clothing. It may be in education. That love is always in Jesus. He is the refuge. He is the one who brings us home to His Father's house, where the Father's loving agenda is ours. Where else would He be?