**12/18/22**

**Joseph… No Speaking Parts Included**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

Who would figure that this little baby that Dax has come to find special interest in each week he is here would cause so much trouble? Yes, I draw your attention to our new nativity set, that is if you have not noticed it yet. This set is more than just some statues or figures that sit up here on display. Every piece, or for that fact person, plays a vital role in our faith. Each person is part of our Christmas story. We are getting close folks! Four candles are now lit on our Advent wreath! This Saturday, at 5PM, we get to celebrate the Christ Child and his birth during our special Christmas Eve Service. His birth leads us down a road of a 33-year old man’s journey that would significantly impact the world and everyone’s lives forever! How cool is it that we get to celebrate his birth every year? How cool is it that we are drawn together not just for some presents under a tree, but for the presence of our Lord and Savior who came to dwell here on earth and give us an everlasting gift that neither you or I even asked for or put on a list? Now, we didn’t ask for it because we initially did not know we needed it. Thank God that he knows our every want and desire before we display an interest or need!

Alright, let me return Baby Jesus back to his rightful place in this nativity scene. Short of us decorating and unboxing this nativity set, short of Dax and I stealing him temporarily, I have not seen him move from this very spot in his manger or crib. He is lying in the feeding trough or food box that holds hay for larger farm animals like the cattle, horses, and donkeys he came to first know when he came into this world. Not a normal birth or story at all! Now, would we really have paid attention if it was? Alright, I will leave that part up to Pastor Jeff when he preaches on Christmas Eve. Let me draw back and get us on today’s topic a little bit more. However, first, let me start with something a little more personal.

You know on any given day at work I can have a lot of interesting experiences. Sometimes they may seem so awkward that they actually are not even real. At times I manage to leave a situation by just simply shaking my head. I listen, assess, understand, and support my individuals that I serve the best that I can. That does not mean it is easy though. It does not mean that there are not some hiccups and hardships on the road. It especially does not mean that everything is solved when I leave them for that particular visit. Working in the mental health field can be very interesting at times. The fortunate part of my job is that I work as part of a Team. When we all get done with our assignments and get back to the office we get the chance to debrief with one another for the day. The stories we have just lived find a way of adding up no matter how awkward they are. Our perception of the events that happened gets logged into individual books, or what we call progress notes in a computer program. These progress notes tell the story about an individual’s life. That is good, bad, or indifferent. Just like the book we as mental health worker’s create, so are the books of the Bible and the various author’s and perceptions we get when we come here each and every Sunday. As I keep going back to work to serve my individuals the best that I can, is how I keep coming back here each and every week to serve my hunger and knowledge about Jesus and his mission. I go to serve because he created such a perfect example that I can barely hold a candle to each and every day, but it is my call, and I am blessed to be able to do what I do through my job and through the message and Word I get to share with you every week.

Now, you may wonder where exactly I am going with this. You may be sitting there in your pews, or in your recliners at home for that very fact, thinking to yourselves, here goes Vince again with a bunch of different stories. Well, of course I am! I realize that I have to make things personal. More importantly I realize that I have to catch your attention in small little windows. I know you and I can only pay attention for a little bit and then our brains trail off into something completely unrelated. Whether it is opening up your pocket book and seeing how many receipts you have in there from your Christmas shopping, and thinking I need to balance my checkbook while Vince rambles on for his eight to ten-page sermon. Just perhaps it is something quite different, and you are worried about that meal sitting in the crock pot. You are wondering if you even plugged it in or turned it on. Right?!? We all do this, and I am not calling you out, or even saying it is wrong. I am just simply reminding you that Jesus taught in this very manner for the same reason. He taught in short stories so everyone had the opportunity to listen and learn, and for that point be able to pay attention. Now, mind you the problems or worries of the times may have been drastically different. Remembering if you tied up your horse or donkey, or if you filled the feeding trough for the animals are very different concerns in the middle of a story. However, they are just as valid as our concerns today. So, let us yet again refocus and return to the concern and focus of today’s Gospel Reading.

Matthew offers us his account of an awkward occurrence. He logged it in his so-called progress notes from the perspective he heard and learned it from. The story I just shared with you a short while ago was Matthew’s account of Joseph having to make a decision. Now, I know this story is much more than that of course. However, this is the point I am going to focus on at this moment. Mind you Joseph had several choices. However, he had one God driven solution!

If you really think about it Joseph was put in a rather awkward situation wasn’t he? His actual call and purpose were so drastically different than that versus what his response should have been if he were to just follow traditional customs. Let me remind you that, “We can face our problems by taking the easy route and following what society would like us to do. But, that usually means self-centered actions and not God fearing decisions.” (4) Joseph came to the eventual decision that most would not! Now, mind you it may have taken a little intervention from an angel or something. He was going to leave; he did not feel he was up to the task. Heck, he really did not even understand what the task was if you really think about it! Just when he was about to leave quietly we get to hear what happened in verses 20 and 21 of our Gospel Reading today. Let me read that again for you to refresh your memory and mine. “20But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”” (1)

Wow! What a relief right? I am sure he was wondering what exactly Mary had done when she had gone off to visit her cousin Elizabeth in Judea for three months. I mean she came back noticeably pregnant before they were even married. No matter what Joseph said before this angel gave him the heads up in his dream the situation was just awkward. Heck, even after the angel cleared up matters for him it was still awkward honestly. This divine pregnancy was not normal; it was not what it looked like in the eyes of the common folk. Quite frankly that is our faith in a nut shell isn’t it? It is not normal, we have to crack it open, and we have to devour it piece by piece so that we get our fill. More importantly, so that we get the opportunity to share it with others too! Oops! Sorry! There I go again trailing off a bit. Or am I?

“And that’s what God enables you to do as well. God doesn’t ask you to understand every aspect of the Bible (which is a good thing – how could we understand the mind of God?). The Lord makes no apologies that many things he teaches us are difficult to understand. God simply invites you to trust him when he says that his Son was born of a virgin, born without any spot or stain of sin. God simply invites you to come back here on Christmas Eve, and peer into the manger, and see your God who has just been born as a fragile little baby. God simply invites you to stare at the cross, stare at the love this Christ will show you as he gives up his life to save yours. God simply invites you to believe that this life isn’t what it’s all about. There is something much better for you, and the Christ-child is the key to your eternal happiness.” (2)

Okay… Okay… back on track Vincent! I hear you out there. Now, “I don’t think we could fault Joseph for jumping to the wrong conclusion regarding Mary’s pregnancy. I mean, in every other pregnancy in human history, there is always a man involved. And Joseph knew that it wasn’t him…so the only possible conclusion was that Mary had been unfaithful to him. Put yourself in his shoes for a second, and imagine how hurt, how disappointed he was. Many would have sought some sort of revenge for being wounded so deeply. And by Jewish law, Joseph would have had the right to really run Mary’s name through the mud. Mary could have been branded as a loose woman with no morals. And had Joseph really wanted to push the issue, she could have been put to death for her alleged adultery” (2)

However, “God knew something that Joseph didn’t know: that Mary hadn’t cheated on him, and that he was to receive about the greatest honor ever bestowed on a mere mortal. Joseph would be the guardian of the God-child. Joseph would protect God.” (2) “Faith is not just agreeing with what God says; it’s doing what he says even when it doesn’t make sense or is “inconvenient.” Joseph willingly sacrificed his reputation and accepted Jesus as his own child. Joseph’s faith would not be disappointed, for his step-son would one day sacrifice more than his reputation; he would sacrifice himself so that Joseph and every other sinner would be accepted as God’s child.” (3)

Who would figure a man with no speaking parts in a live action play would have so much effect on the end result? Who would figure that Joseph, a carpenter, would influence the outcome so drastically? Who would figure that we needed such a man to make our story even more so believable? “Joseph showed us that much of life is about relationships. Our relationship to God in the form of belief and obedience, and our relationship to others through our mercy and compassion.” (4)

Amen.

**References**

(1) SundaysandSeasons.com

Sunday, December 18, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A

(2) SermonCentral.com

What Would Joseph Do? (Series)

Contributed by Peter Schmidt on Dec 20, 2004

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Denomination: Lutheran

(3) SermonCentral.com

Joseph The Faith-Action Hero Series

Contributed by Daniel Habben on Dec 23, 2012

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

Joseph's Example: Believe And Obey

Contributed by Scott Jensen on Dec 18, 2007

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 1:18-25**

Matthew’s story of Jesus’ birth focuses on the role of Joseph, who adopts the divinely-begotten child into the family of David and obediently gives him the name Jesus, which means “God saves.”

18Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

 23“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

  and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.”24When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.