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Matthew 1:18-25
December 24, 2017
“You’re kidding, right?”

Opening

- In last week’s message, Sandra examined Mary’s Magnificat- the canticle of praise sung by Mary upon her visit to her cousin Elizabeth.
 - o We heard how Mary went to see Elizabeth and when they see each other, what follows is a magnificent exchange, where Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaims “Mary, you are blessed among women!”
 - o In response, Mary sings a song of praise- “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”
- That’s a pretty magnificent, glorious and amazing story, don’t you think?
 - o Yet in today’s reading, all is not so glorious and amazing for Joseph.
 - Unlike Mary, Joseph wasn’t so quick to say “let it be with me.”
 - He had to move past questioning God, in order to put his full trust In God.

Mary’s visit to Elizabeth

- After her visit from the Angel Gabriel, Mary “immediately” left to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who is six months expectant.
 - o The two women stay together, ministering to one another.
 - Mary stays with Elizabeth for 3 months, likely through the birth of Elizabeth’s son, John the Baptist.
 - After John’s birth, Mary returns home.
- Now, the Gospels don’t really provide much detail as to when Mary actually informed Joseph she was with child.
 - o However, from scripture (Luke) we know that “with haste,” Mary went on her visit.
 - So, we can at least infer that Mary did not immediately tell Joseph that she was with child.
 - And some early church traditions indicate that Mary may have waited as long as six months before she revealed to Joseph that she was with child.
(Protoevangelium of James)

How Joseph might feel?

- How do you suppose Joseph felt when Mary finally reveals that she is expecting?
 - o Joseph had been planning to be married to Mary.
 - They had been engaged and Joseph loved her.
 - Joseph had given his heart to Mary.
 - He had made a promise to be true to her and loyal to her.
 - He had envisioned a life together with her.
 - o All of this- and now Joseph realizes that the woman he loves is going to have a child that is not his.

Relating to Joseph’s feelings

- Can you relate to Joseph’s feelings?
 - o I imagine anyone who has ever felt the sting of betrayed love can identify.
 - o I can understand how Joseph might have felt at least a little.

- You know, my wife is the first person with whom I have been truly in love, but she wasn't the first with whom I THOUGHT I was in love.
 - Like most boys growing up, I had my heart broken more than once and I recall vividly a particular girlfriend I had back in high school.
 - Well, that is for about a month, I had this girlfriend.
 - We had started visiting with one another and over the course of a month I made several visits to her home see her.
 - We would sit near each other and talk- it was all pretty innocent, but in that short time, I had become taken with her.
 - It seemed like we were hitting it off and that our affection for one another had grown over time
 - Then one day, my friends at school told me that my girl had thrown a party at her home over the weekend- and I hadn't been invited.
 - I was devastated.
 - I mean, what kind of chump has a girlfriend who throws a party and doesn't even invite her boyfriend?
 - Worse yet, I learned I no longer had a girlfriend.
 - It seems my girl had apparently decided to dump me for one of my best friends.
 - In that moment, my seemingly ideal relationship fell apart.
- I stopped visiting her and for the longest time, I didn't want to see this girl.
 - You know, we guys were raised to be tough and I, like most men, try to carry my pain inside without letting others see it.
 - However, in those moments where it is just you and your thoughts, heartbreak such as that cuts deep and is profoundly painful.
- Do you think Joseph might have felt that way at least a little?
 - We know he felt compelled to end the relationship- and that had to hurt.
- Mary has been away on a lengthy visit.
 - They've been separated and now Joseph discovers Mary is already "with child" and she tells him that this child is God's child.
- I can imagine Joseph might have been thinking "You're kidding, right?"
 - "I'm supposed to believe that story"
 - "I'm supposed to believe that the baby your carrying is God's son?"
 - "Surely your kidding- you must think I'm a fool!"

Joseph has his dream

- Joseph wasn't buying into Mary's story.
 - Verse 19 of the scripture from Matthew tells us that Joseph was planning to quietly dismiss Mary and he wouldn't do that if he believed her.
- Now, Joseph was a righteous man and he wanted to do the right thing.
 - In that moment, all he knew was that his perfect world had come crashing down around him.
 - What he couldn't foretell in that moment was that he had actually received the highest honor any human man could ever receive.
 - He had been chosen to be the "earthly" father of God's "heavenly" child
 - God had chosen this righteous man to be the male figure that would shape and influence the character of Jesus.
 - Joseph would shape the destiny of the entire world.

Sometimes our pain blinds us to God's providence

- Yet it didn't feel like an honor to Joseph- he couldn't see it.
 - o He couldn't see the tremendous accolade God had bestowed upon him
 - All he could feel was pain.
 - And because of his pain, he missed God's divine plan working in his life.
- Sometimes it is like that for us as well, in our lives.
 - o I now see that my heartbreak back in high school was the best thing that ever happened to me, otherwise I might never have met my wife.
 - But at the time, I couldn't see that.
 - I was too hurt, angry and embarrassed.
- It is true that pain can cause that sort of blindness.
 - o We try to live lives that are righteous and yet come times when we experience great pain.
 - o We live life trying to do God's will and still there are times when our own pain blinds us as to God's plan.
- Yes, in our lives we will encounter moments which cause us struggle.
 - o That is just the way life is and there is no getting around it.
- But if we will place those moments in God's hands, God will redeem them.
 - o If we will place our trials in God's hands, we will be amazed at what God will do through our lives.
- Sometimes when people go through difficulties, they want to BLAME GOD and they turn their back on God.
 - o That's a shame, because they deny God's will to work for good and they miss their destiny.

Joseph hears and obeys God

- That didn't happen to Joseph, though
 - o As hurt as he was, Joseph was merciful towards Mary and he couldn't bring himself to cause harm to her.
 - o So, instead, he decided that he would leave her quietly.
 - o In the midst of his pain, Joseph had a legal right to lash out at Mary and make her pay for the pain he was feeling.
 - But Joseph was righteous and he realized that he could not cause harm to the woman he loves.
 - o And I think that by showing this mercy, Joseph affirmed to God, his selection as Jesus' earthly father.
 - o That's the thing about mercy - it blesses both the receiver and the giver.
- Now, the story doesn't end there.
 - o Just when Joseph had given up on Mary and is about to leave her, God intervenes and speaks to him.
 - In a dream God sends an angel to Joseph and the angel tells him, that all of this is to fulfill what had been spoken by the prophet Isaiah.
 - And the angel quotes the scripture we heard from our first reading this morning.
 - Through this dream God shares a vision with Joseph and now Joseph sees what it is that God is doing.

Is Jesus speaking to you?

- Now when was the last time God spoke to you in a dream?
 - o I have to admit that either I don't dream much, or I don't pay attention to them, because I rarely remember dreams. And I find this part of the story really pretty amazing.

- Had Joseph not paid attention to his dream, he might very well have left Mary.
 - And life for Mary and Jesus would have been very different.
 - But Joseph was listening for God.
 - And when God spoke, Joseph paid attention.
- Joseph **BELIEVED** it was God who spoke and he obeyed God.
 - Joseph stays with Mary and becomes the earthly father of Jesus.
 - And we can be thankful he did.
 - Because Joseph, a righteous man, was raising up a child to be righteous.
 - We all know that sons tend to grow up like their fathers.
 - And what does it tell us about the character of Joseph, that Jesus grew into a man who was able to share his love with so many
 - This morning, we lit the **Advent candle representing love**.
 - That seems fitting, because Jesus gives tremendous love.
 - And I'd bet that growing up, Jesus received tremendous fatherly love.
- Do you sometimes wonder if God is speaking to you?
 - Is it possible that God is speaking to you, but you aren't listening?
 - In order to obey, we must first listen to God.
 - Yet all too often, we don't listen.
 - It seems our busy and hectic lives don't allow enough quiet to even hear God.
 - The quiet in our lives gets drowned out by the iPhone, the iPad, the iPod or the iWhatever and we miss God's voice.
- We know that God generally speaks to us in subtle ways
 - In our dreams
 - In that "ah ha" moment with a loved one.
 - In that inspiring moment during prayer.
- Yet we are so busy listening to the noise in our lives that we can't possibly hear.
 - Friends, I'd offer that we need to be less hard-of-hearing.
 - God is speaking to each of us all the time and perhaps we need to spend more time expecting God to speak listening for that voice.
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Wrap it up

- The story of Joseph teaches us that when pain and suffering abound in life, our response can be strength.
 - That we can continue to pursue a life with Christ.
 - That is what Joseph did.
- Lastly, this story teaches us about our need to listen and obey God.
 - God gently whispers to us in many ways- through the scriptures, through prayer, and through fellowship.
 - We need to be listening and we need to be willing to obey.
 - When we do that, we find ourselves part of God's master plan, contributing to God's work.
 - And if we do that, we will be able to look back over our lives and say "Thank You Lord. What an amazing journey it has been and what wondrous things you have done!"
- Amen!