

Messes and Miracles
Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18, 2022, 10:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mark Chase

Good Morning Friends, ya'll look amazing as always. You may be seated. This morning, I want to start a petition, will you help me? I know we sign petitions all the time around here at All Saints but this morning, I want to start a petition, to get a Christmas Song, that's just for Joseph. Cuz ya'll Hark the herald angels sing, and silent night, and all I want for Christmas is you, just do not do Justice, to what was probably going through the heart and mind of Joseph, in this passage and it probably deserves a song...those other songs are too happy, peaceful, and resolved...

Ya'll, we need at least one Christmas song, that tells the truth, that this looks like a hot flaming mess....We need at least one Christmas Song, that tells the truth this advent, that as we approach The Christmas Story, it looks way more like a Christmas Mess, than it does a Christmas Miracle...This looks like a mess! One of the principle stories, that we tell about our faith...reads like a soap opera...Bold and The Beautiful, ain't got nothin on, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus....It looks like a mess....And it's a critical part, of the Christmas story...But Beloved, that just might be a small glimpse of Good News this morning, because I don't know about you, but aren't we all in a bit of a mess right now? Don't raise your hands, just blink your eyes.... It's okay, if this Christmas, it feels like you've got more of a mess, than you do a miracle....it's okay, don't let capitalism and consumerism fool you, with all the commercials, and all the fancy lights, and look, my family and I, love some lights we'll probably see some tonight, up in Hastings ranch, we'll check out all the lights and houses we can't afford, but beloved, I know this is the time of year where everything on the outside, tries to convince that everything ought to be okay, on the inside... but it's okay, if everything's not okay! Look at your neighbor and say, "it's okay, if everything's not okay..."

What if that's where the Good News of this season begins....with the truth that it's more than okay, if right now, our lives, are more than a mess. Maybe it's the messiness of grief, for some of us, we're navigating the reality, of our first Christmas, without that loved one, that made so many of our Christmas memories so special, and if it's not the first Christmas without that special someone, it can still feel like it when the time comes around.... it's okay...if it's still not okay....for some of us it may be, the messiness of marriage, and just the thought, of meeting under the mistletoe, makes us wonder, whose bright idea that was, in the first place...don't raise your hand just blink...Maybe it's the messiness of raising children, or of our jobs, and the excruciating weight of importance, that capitalism puts on our doing, at the expense of our being, our souls were wired for meaningful connection, and instead we're being hurled left and right, towards mass production....which puts pressure and strain, on all of our relationships, because we're either too tired for them, or we ain't got the time for them...and with the passing of DJ tWitch this past week by suicide, we're reminded, of the sometimes invisible messiness, of our mental health, and the internal battles that are raging inside so many of us... as we look towards Christmas, what if the Good News to our souls was first, that's it okay, if we've got way more mess, than we've got miracle....Ahhh find another neighbor and say

neighbor "It's okay, if you've got way more mess, than you've got miracle." As a matter of fact, can we just have a moment of Silence, for all the places in our lives, and all the places in this world, where there is way more mess, than there is miracle...

Joseph finds himself in a mess..and he's decided, what he's going to do about that mess...he's confused, and feels his world is spinning out of control so he decides in his heart of hearts to stop the spinning quietly (no Facebook or Instagram posts, no trips to the Maury show, no visits to the Red Table with Jada and Willow to talk it out, no need to seek relationship counseling by emailing SHoward@allsaints-pas.org ...He's done, and he's going to be done, quietly. But beloved, think about what's happening in this story as we zoom out a little bit, could it be, that It is so other worldly to Joseph, and to the world that Joseph is a product of, could it be that It is so other worldly, that a woman be at the center of Gods story, that her centering feels like betrayal? Could It be that it is so other worldly, to Joseph, and to the world that Joseph was a product of, that a woman being centered in the story of God, feels like betrayal....now, granted, these are some wild circumstances....But Mary, isn't betraying Joseph, she's being centered by God. Mary isn't betraying Joseph, she's being centered by God. And if anyone IS engaged in betrayal, it is the very person of God God-self, As God, is the betraying the logic, of every system, that would say that someone like Mary, should not birth, someone like Jesus. Indeed friends, What The Spirit of God shows us is in this story, is that Betrayal, is actually an act of worship, in the face of systems that don't deserve our obedience in the first place! I'll say that one more time, Betrayal, is actually an act of worship, in the face of systems, that don't deserve our obedience, in the first place. She is a poor brown, teenager, who is about to become a refugee, who is at the very center of the story of God. This is not the story, that the Patriarchy would write, that White Supremacy, would write, that Xenophobia would write, or despite the staggering prices of nativity scenes these days, that Capitalism and Consumerism would write. But the Good News today is, that where the Systems of oppression and marginalization drop the pen, due to a lack of imagination and inspiration, The Holy Spirit picks up the pen, and says thank you very much, I'll take it from here, and writes a story, far beyond our wildest dreams...

Ahhh The Good News this morning begins, with something that looks like a mess, but the Good News continues, because within the messiness, there exists a divine message....Within the messiness, there exists a divine message...And that divine message, is so out of this world, that God has to tell it to Joseph, in a dream. God thinks, okay, we either going have to get him drunk.... or just wait until he falls asleep....after a long deliberation they choose option B...cuz that just reads better...The Angel of God came to Joseph in a bar just doesn't have the same ring...

So Joseph falls asleep, and The divine messenger begins to speak. And I want us to look deeply at Joseph's response throughout this text, because Joseph's response, to what God and Mary are collaborating on, is what helps keep the Good news of advent moving....Joseph's response....is silence....The angel of God tells Joseph, do not be afraid, to take Mary as your wife, for she is not betraying YOU, but she is BIRTHING Jesus...don't impute guilt, upon the body of Mary, because through the body of Mary, is coming the very Mercy of God....Yes, God interrupts Joseph, and God also interrupts us, who live in a society where women's bodies, are

constantly imputed with guilt, shame, and hypersexualization, not exclusively but most especially, the bodies of Black, Asian, Latinx and Indigenous women....As Dr. Chanequa Walker Barnes writes in her book "I bring the voices of my people" "Always and everywhere, the bodies and behaviors of women of color are judged by standards that are neither of their making nor of their choosing, standards that maintain and reinforce white supremacist, heteropatriarchy." So God has to interrupt Joseph, and God is also interrupting us...Going outside the constructs of patriarchy, in order to bring us a savior...or as Sojourner Truth once said in her speech ain't I a woman *"who says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Well, Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him."* Ahhhh All Saints Church I'm so glad, that God went around the patriarchy, because the patriarchy, could never have brought us around, to Jesus, Patriarchy is a compound word that at its simplest means "father-Rule", but the "rule, of the father", was incapable of bringing us any closer to the Love, of the heavenly father, so God, went around all the so called "ruling" fathers, and she partnered with Mary, to Mother us, into the love of Christ.....ah cmon that was good....God is so good, and so creative, that SHE mothered us, past the father rule, into the embrace, of the Father's love, in Christ...and God, can do that, because They, exist beyond the social constructs of gender binaries thereby making way for unlimited forms of expression and connection to us their creation!....but ya'll responding like Joseph....silence...

Joseph's silence is a silence that serves to center what God is doing through Mary. Joseph's silence is centering. He doesn't take up any un-necessary space. Beloved, Sometimes, when God is doing something through our siblings one of the most helpful things we can do, especially, if we belong to a social group that is used to speaking and being centered is to shhhhhhhhhhhhh, and allow God to be God, and allow our siblings, to be and to do, all that God is calling them to be and to do... Sometimes the most powerful word we can speak, and the most powerful contribution we can make is shhhhhh, matter of fact just turn to your neighbor..... naaahhhh we won't go there, don't want nobody to get in trouble...if you already got in trouble then healing is available in the baptistry and chapel during communion... sometimes are most important contribution to what God is doing, is silence... It's kind of like this.

I'll never forget, growing up in Mount Vernon New York, one of the first places I learned to give public addresses, one of the first places I actually became a public communicator and speaker, was in freestyle rap cyphers, in my High School cafeteria, and in these rap cyphers, you'd have dozens and dozens of people, gathered around, and in the midst of all these people, they'd be one person rapping and rhyming, and the job, of the crowd that was gathered around, was to bear witness, and to amplify the person's voice at the center, by just remaining silent, so that the person with the rhymes and the rhythm could be heard loud and clear.... the silence of the crowd, served as microphone for the emcee...

Ahhhh if you get it early...I don't preach as long... All Saint's Church....Joseph's silence is a silence that actually serves, as a microphone, for Mary's voice, and amplify's Mary's agency, and amplify's Mary's work with God...His Silence...oddly enough, is a silence that turns up the

volume! On What God is doing, in the life of Mary, and turns up the volume, on what God is doing, on behalf of all of humanity...Joseph's silence, turns up the volume, on the coming of Jesus, turns up the volume, on the hope of Advent, turns up the volume, on the coming of God's grace and mercy, through Jesus....in his silence, Joseph is turning up the volume, on Mary

Joseph's silence is also a covering. If Joseph speaks, especially in accordance to what he originally thought about doing, it would mean at best, social and economic insecurity for Mary, and at worst, a public execution, due to the structure of patriarchal violence and purity. That was absolutely a possibility for Mary... Which is ironic because the Angel tells Joseph not be afraid, but it's really Mary who has the most to lose... His silence then, serves to cover and protect, what God is doing... In Mary. His silence, and obedience to the Divine Message, serves as true Allyship to Mary.

All that silence, creates a pathway for hope, joy, peace, and love.....

And The Good News is, as I get ready to close, I know that's good news too for a lot of us lol. But The Good News is, the true power of Advent, and the true Power of Christmas, isn't only that it happened, but that it is yet and still happening! God With Us, isn't past tense. What we long for in Advent, and what we'll celebrate on Christmas isn't about that one time that God did that one thing, but it's about the reality that at any time, God can do a NEW thing! And that in the midst of any mess, there exists divine possibilities! And that God is yet and still, looking for people to Birth what God is doing in the world.

The Good News of Advent is that you don't have to be with Child, in order to be expecting, ah that's a mind trip, you don't have to be with Child, in order to be expecting, but as we look toward Christ, in a world ravaged by the suffering of war, gun violence, and death, we can be a people **expecting** love to conquer hate, and partnering with God, to birth peace in our world, in our streets, and in our homes, we can be a people, expecting peace, as we partner with God to bring Justice that rolls down like water. We can be a people, expecting joy, that comes in the morning, as we partner with God, to sit shiva, with the weeping that endures through the night, we can be a people, expecting a Christmas miracle, in the midst, of a Christmas mess, expecting God to do, what only God can do, expecting the status quo, to longer be the status quo, as we partner with God to bring her Kindom, here on earth.

Ahhh, somebody give God a praise in this place, if you know that the power of Christmas, is that it is still happening today...

Amen.