

Sermon – Our Saviors Lutheran Church- December 23rd 2018
4th Sunday in Advent – Text- Matthew 1:18-25

Trusting, Joseph Style

Well, here we are, at the end. It's the 4th Sunday of Advent. Tomorrow, we gather on Christmas Eve. The next day we also gather for our Christmas Day service, and celebrate the birth of Emmanuel, God With Us.

Where did the time go? It seems like the older we get, the more time flies by. But, we are probably ready. Baking, shopping, all the stuff that we needed to do. Yes? If not, don't worry. There is still time. That's an ELCA theological concept. There is always time - especially for the concept of metanoia. You know, turn around, repentance. But we are not at Christmas yet. We are still in Advent. As ELCA Lutherans we are still singing Advent tunes. Like soulful tunes in minor keys like "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," or some Teutonic hymns with dark melodies. The rest of the world has been singing beautiful Christmas carols since Halloween and we are still in this penitential season. It seems like we can't be happy unless we are sad first. Like having 6 weeks of lent before Easter. We judge the heights of our joy by the degree of sadness that precedes it.

As I wrote this homily, my mind went back to the days just before Christmas as I grew up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Home of many Brooklyn Dodger greats. A 1st generation kid from a Holy Land Family. We really didn't deal with Advent. For us Christmas was the big deal. I ventured out with my Father, named Otto, to search for our Christmas tree, usually a few days before Christmas. Why so late? Well, the trees were pretty cheap - and we celebrated the 12 days of Christmas. Every day from Christmas on there would be a small present and we would focus on the gift of Jesus in our lives. Christmas for us only ended on Epiphany Sunday. That's a tradition I still maintain on this day. We never take down our tree until we celebrate the Magi and their journey. Maybe that's what we need to do. Make Christmas not a one day event but extend it.

But, as I said we are still in Advent. I titled this exercise in a homily, 'Trusting Joseph Style'. Let's set the stage.

In the 1st century, marriages took place in three stages. First, there was engagement. This was where the marriage was arranged between both sets of parents when the couple were still quite young. Second, there was the betrothal, which took place one year before marriage. At this stage, the girl could refuse the agreement, but if she accepted, the only way the agreement could be broken was by divorce. The couple was legally married but could not consummate the marriage until the third and final part of the marriage took place. That part was the wedding celebration, when the groom took the bride home to be his wife. Little different today! Yes?

So here is Joseph. He has completed the first two steps in the wedding process. He is engaged to Mary, and finds out that she is pregnant. He hasn't seen her for a few months. He has been busy at the carpenter shop making all those crosses the Romans ordered. The text says that Joseph was a man who always did what was right. Well, that might be stretching it a little bit. But, let's say he was probably religious and knew the rules of the day about marriage. And he is hurt. So he decides to move along and at least get out of this relationship before it's too late. Maybe he makes plans to take a little trip to the sea coast of Ceserea. Maybe a single's cruise. Maybe leave a 'dear John' or 'dear Mary' letter behind. Who could blame him.

Joseph has a dream one night and in the dream an angel appears- we have had those dreams. The Angel says "don't worry Joe". Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph probably wanted his address. No, said the angel. The Holy Spirit. She will have a son and you, Joseph, will name him Jesus - because he will save his people. Wow!

And what does Joseph do? He operates out of trust, not out of control. So what do we take from this account. What's it all about Alfie, for you and me?

I want you to think back to all those circumstances that were tough.

Maybe it was an illness.

Maybe it was a serious marriage issue.

Maybe it was an issue that involved your children

Maybe it was a finance situation

Maybe it was work related.

Do it, think back. When we addressed the issue by being in control, how did it work out for us? Not very good, did it?

But, when we gave up the control and put it in God's hands, how did it work out? You know as well as I do when we say - God, I can't fix this. I am unable. So I trust. I am putting this in your hands. I trust you will be with me just like you were for Joseph. I trust in this concept of Emmanuel. God with us. And we also know it worked for Joseph and it will work for us.

Trust and never stop.
Amen. Let it be so.