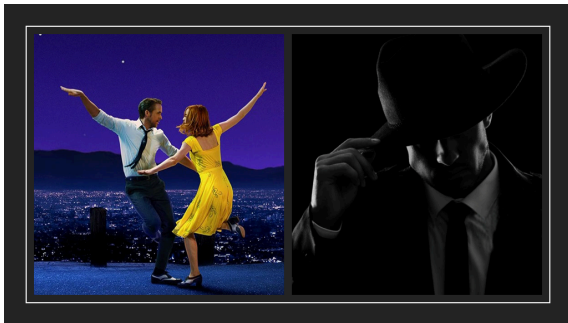


Advent #3



Sue Cepin
Dec. 15, 2024

As I have moved toward this morning, I have heard the Holy Spirit say to me, “Listen.” So I’d like to pause now and invite you to attend to what the good Father is telling you this morning: notice emotion, images, ideas, and words.



We are in an advent series that focuses on human emotional experiences: aloneness, anger, being afraid, and feeling ashamed. This week we are talking about being afraid, particularly in Joseph’s life. Often in Advent, we focus on the Gospel of Luke, which was Mary’s perspective on what happened. There are prophecies and people singing: It’s musical theater! But Joseph’s perspective found in the Gospel of Matthew is mysterious, intriguing, and happens in the middle of the night. N.T. Wright points out there are no efforts to

reconcile these two stories.



For example, if you ask Eric how the Village started, you get a map, a chronology, places and events in a linear and clear format BUT if you ask me, you get color, textures, clothing: snapshots of so many things jumbled together. Together with Eric, we tell the same story but with very different details.

“Do not be afraid.”

-The angel Gabriel
to Mary in Luke 1:30

-The angel to Joseph
in Matthew 1:20

However, in both Luke’s (Mary’s) and Matthew’s telling of the story, there is commonality in the words that the angel spoke: **Do not be afraid.**

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

Matthew 2:13

Here we pick up the story after the Magi leave. Notice the scariness of what just happened: a visit from an angel and the instruction to **Get Up**. This is headed to a great deal of LOSS: leaving behind everything you know, your career, your stuff and moving to a new culture where everything is unknown. In addition, Joseph faces the knowledge that someone is hunting him to kill his child. He is called to immediate obedience.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. **And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”**

Matthew 2:14-15

This is urgent and he responds with urgency. Matthew is not only telling Joseph's story but picking up OT concepts and highlighting them (words in green from Isa 11:1). Actually, Matthew is just bookmarking the whole passage. This is referring to God's people group, Israel, whom he had saved from slavery. Matthew is saying this is **also** about Jesus because the salvation of the Lord has appeared.



Matt is saying the OT is like a mysterious treasure map that could fall into the wrong hands. A key indicates symbols that only some people understand: Matt is saying he has the key to the map and that the treasure is Jesus.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets... searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the **time and circumstances** to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **Even angels long to look into these things.**

1 Peter 1:10-12

This mystery was hidden from both godly people & evil people, and angels & demonic powers. This mystery is for God's purposes but we can look back for clues. The secrets for the map were pointing in a direction that needed the discernment of the Holy Spirit.



This should remind you of ancient tales of a baby born who is the rightful heir into a kingdom controlled by an

evil uncle. This is like Jesus: he is hidden from earthly and heavenly powers and shuffled off to Egypt.

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

Matthew 2:19-21

Between these two verses, Herod killed the babies in Bethlehem and then he died. This is the 3rd angelic visit to Joseph in his dreams: “Get up” is repeated.

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

Matthew 2:22-23a

As he moves back toward Israel, he attends to his emotions and something shifts: he is afraid and goes to Nazareth instead. We don’t know much about the dream but he takes the contents of what is happening and discerns that he should go to Nazareth.

Discernment → Dependence → Devotion

Going back to the first Advent Sermon: Discernment leads to Devotion and then Dependency

So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23b

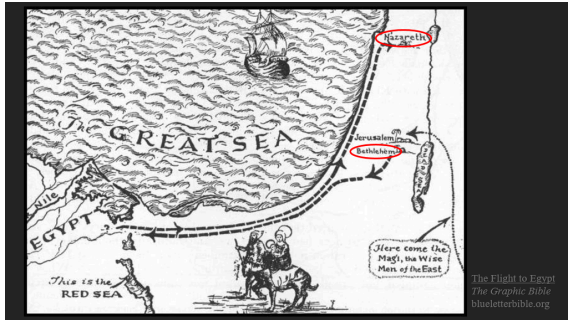
Another prophecy occurs: but we actually have no prophecy in the OT that says Jesus would be a Nazarene.

Isa 11:1 talks about a shoot coming from Jesse in the line of Jesus.



A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch [nēšer] will bear fruit. Isaiah 11:1

Branch, Stump of Jesse
Linoleum block print by Elizabeth Steele Halstead



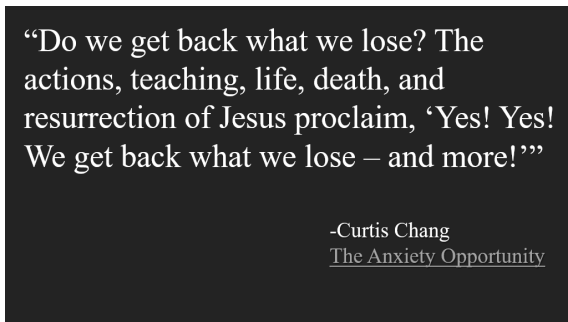
Here is an old map showing Joseph taking his family around the sea from the border of Egypt to Bethlehem, 40 miles, which is like from here to Casa Grande. It's not that far but it is a different country. You can tell this is told from Joseph's perspective because he talks about Magi's gift of gold. Joseph is the provider and sees this provision from God. Next, they go to Nazareth in the region of Galilee because it was out of the realm of the ruler there.

In summary, Joseph shows us what it looks like to be very afraid and yet move forward into God's purposes.



This brings us to this question today: What are you afraid to lose? Health, success, control, comfort, dignity, population, relationship, connectedness, safety, or someone you love the most? What are you afraid to lose?

Curtis Chang wrote a book called the "Anxiety Opportunity" where he says **we are all in the process of losing everything**. We are losing all the things mentioned above! It's only a matter of when.



Joseph lost some things along the way and gained some of them back and then he died before he likely knew about Jesus's ministry or even who he was. The same happened to Herod. Chang says people also ask "Do we get back what we lose?" The actions of Jesus, his death and resurrection, proclaim the answer to be yes!



Do you remember October this year, the warmest October on record? It was still 99 on Oct. 26! We thought the heat would never end. But then the winds started and on Oct. 29 I heard the Holy Spirit say **The Winds are Changing!** It went to 75 that day and never went back up high. You can also see

these winds of change in Matthew's genealogy: Abraham left everything he knew and went to a different place because of the winds of change. Later, King David left everything he knew and he was able to do scary things because he knew the winds of change were blowing. Then Babel and exile shows uprooted people see the winds of change. Then Joseph can listen to angels in dreams and move out despite his fear. Today they are still blowing: he is inviting us into a hope and salvation for all nations.

“So do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

As Eric said, God's presence is a great comfort to us. When he calls us to step into places that no one else inhabits, we feel small, alone, and powerless. God is saying regardless of how you feel, it doesn't matter. Stepping forward in obedience is accompanied by God with us! He is accomplishing all this himself through our obedience.

LEAN INTO DISCOMFORT

- Fast
- Care for those who are vulnerable
- Be transformed by Scripture

SEEK GOD'S CALLING

- Receive disruptions as gifts
- Lean into what is only possible with God
- Obey God without understanding everything

We learn from Joseph to lean into discomfort: Fasting is an invitation to let go of distractions and complacency and to lean in and attend to what God is doing: to listen and be uncomfortable to what God is calling us to.

The church through the ages calls us to be transformed through scripture: we stay in it and it nourishes us and changes us and be aware of the winds of change. Joseph calls us to seek God's

calling on our lives: the angel showing up in dreams was disruptive yet Joseph heeds it and saves the life of his baby. What is God calling me to? Joseph couldn't do the impossible (to flee) without God's help and provision. What are the impossible things God is calling me to step into. We are called to an obedience that doesn't require us to understand everything.

Listen, attend, and step forward as you face your fears.