

## **Sermon – Sunday, December 18, 2022**

**Rev. Randi**

Sometimes God asks us to do strange things. Consider Joseph. Jewish law in his time was that the child Mary bore belonged to its father. By marrying Mary, Joseph would be usurping another man's right to the child. Jewish law also said that virginity before marriage was critical. Not to be a virgin was to disgrace the groom's family.

Yet God asks Joseph in a dream not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. That request was already strange enough because it went against Jewish law. But then God tells Joseph that the baby Mary is carrying is from the Holy Spirit. That's even stranger.

Yet Joseph believes what God tells him in the dream and acts accordingly. He marries Mary, and he names Jesus, meaning that he adopts him as his own. The adoption satisfies the prophecy that the baby is of the lineage of David. The baby's birth of the Holy Spirit satisfies the requirement that the baby is "God with us."

Joseph's response is unlike that of Ahaz. Ahaz doesn't even trust God enough to ask for a sign when the prophet Isaiah tells him to ask for a sign.

God's ways are not our ways. God's kingdom is different from the earthly kingdom. God asks us to do things to bring about God's kingdom on earth. So, often God will ask us to do things that seem strange to us in the context of what's happening in the world. Our calling is to trust God and to act.

However, I want to mention a caution here. Sometimes people have all sorts of dreams and see things that they think are of God. We've all read stories of people who say God told them to kill all the people with pink hair or whatever. When we think God is calling us to do something strange, we must consider whether what we're being asked to do is within God's character. Killing people is not. Causing conflict is not.

If we're unsure whether a message is from God, we can discern it in the community with others. We can ask if others perceive the same call of us that we do.

Once we understand that the message is from God, we act on it.

Joseph would have known the prophecy that a Messiah would come through David's line. Joseph would have known the prophecy of a young woman carrying a child who would save the people from their sins. Joseph, who by this point was an old man, would have been familiar with the passage in Joel that we read a few weeks ago – the passage about old men dreaming dreams. So, strange as it was, the message Joseph received in the dream was in line with what Joseph knew about God. And Joseph acted on the message not just to be rebellious but rather to obey God.

Throughout history, we've seen examples of people who received a message from God to do something unusual and did so. Martin Luther King Jr, for instance, heard the call to encourage nonviolent resistance to laws that treated people of color unjustly. King went against the conventional rules without resorting to violence to bring about the Kingdom of God. Although King gained great fame, that fame wasn't the motive behind

his campaigns. The motive was to follow the call of God. In that way, he was like Joseph.

So, let's think about the ways God speaks to us today. Sometimes, God may still speak in a dream. However, as the poet David Whyte writes, often, "the call will not come so grandly, so biblically, but intimately in the face of one you know you have to love." You'll see in that face the call to help – even if assisting that person means acting in ways different from society.

I also think God speaks with a nudge or a feeling. We can probably all recount experiences when we suddenly felt we should do something. I had one this week. Seemingly, out of the blue, I had a feeling I should accompany a woman to an East Aurora nursing home to visit her sister. The feeling turned out to be correct. She needed me that day.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to tune into God when God speaks. When we do feel the call to do something unusual, we consider whether the call aligns with what we already know about God. Once we're sure we've got our instructions from God, we act, trusting that God will bring about a good outcome.