

Advent 4 - St. Joseph

Relegated

- Joseph has always been relegated to the background of Christmas pageants, looking on, doing nothing much besides gazing, peering over Mary's shoulders, hanging on to the donkey's reins,
 - The focus is on the real "stars" of the drama, Jesus and his mother Mary. No dramatic skills required to play Joseph. He's just there. He just stands there.
- We don't know much about Joseph - and the little we know seems fairly inconsequential. He worked in construction. A laborer who worked hard for a living. Not a star.
 - Oddly, God's highest calling might be for us to be like Joseph. He was simply there. He stuck close to Jesus, and that was enough.

Righteous

- However there was something spectacular on Joseph's resume: he was righteous (Matthew 1:19).
- What does the Bible, and the Jews and Jesus mean when they use the word "righteous": and "righteousness?"
 - The phrase "being righteous" is how the Hebrew word Tzadeqah is translated.
- Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, chief Rabbi of Great Britain (1991-2013) has written that the word Tzadeqah, is really untranslatable.
 - Tzadeqah, Rabbi Sacks writes, cannot be translated because it joins together two concepts that in other languages are opposites: "charity" and "justice."
 - What would be regarded by us as charity is in Judaism a strict requirement of the law and can be enforced by the courts.
- Rabbi Sacks writes that the nearest English equivalent to Tzadeqah is the phrase "Social Justice."
 - This deals with the concept that no one should be deprived of the basic requirements of existence,

- This is why we hear Isaiah (58:7) speaking of righteousness as:
 - Sharing your bread with the hungry
 - and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
 - covering the naked when you see them,
 - and not hiding from your own family
 - opening your heart to the hungry,
 - and providing abundantly for those who are afflicted
- Joseph was a righteous man, who did not disregard the dream with the angel
 - He was quiet and prayerful enough to be in sync with God's messenger,
 - And so he refused to pass judgment. Instead, he stayed with Mary
- I suspect that Jesus learned much about righteousness from St. Joseph
 - Jesus' passion for righteousness led him to reach out to those on the margins of society — the poor, women, children, Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes

How do we follow the example of Joseph

- How do we follow the example of Joseph, who was so close to Jesus?
- I am good at finding fault, and I can zero in on what's wrong with everybody else.
 - But Jesus came so we would not judge, so we could become righteous, like the righteousness we hope for.
- A judgmental thought lands on your doorstep and knocks? Don't answer.
 - A critical remark hangs on your lips? Be quiet.
 - An ugly observation, about somebody out there, someone you love, or even yourself, suggests itself?
 - Take a breath, and imagine Joseph standing lovingly next to Mary, whom he could have despised, and over Jesus, God's love bundled in the manger.
- Joseph doesn't fit in to our cynical culture very well.
 - We are quick to doubt, swift to blame.

Sunday, December 22, 2019

- A jaded skepticism seems to work for many of us.
 - But Joseph, the righteous man who listened to God's messenger, believes Mary's story, and God's,
 - He trusts. He stays.
- The fact that he's just standing there is all we really need to know, all we really need to do.
 - Maybe this Advent we can learn what it means just to stand nearby the manger, to look, to wait, to stay, to trust.
 - To trust in the message of hope that God reminds about during this time of year
 - The message that God is not only our hope, but that God has placed that hope within us.