



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

December 11, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

The Third Sunday of Advent: Joseph chooses the better way (Matthew 1:18-25)

Joseph was a righteous man. This is all we really know about him, but this statement plus the actions he takes in today's passage speak volumes about who he was. It also reveals much about who Jesus would grow to be and who we are to walk as faithful disciples of Christ.

Joseph is a righteous man suddenly faced with a difficult situation. Mary, the woman to whom he is betrothed, is pregnant. According to the Law, she could face public execution. And while some historians dispute if such a capital punishment was ever actually carried out, she was subject to exile, alienation, or a life of perpetual widowhood. As a woman who was pregnant outside of her promise of marriage, she was in a very precarious situation. Joseph knew it.

So he made a choice—to end the marriage quietly. It seems as if he was going to try and keep her from the public shame as much as he could. He would not marry her, but he would also skirt the Law for the sake of her protection.

Matthew tells us that he was a righteous man, which means he is one who would follow the Law. Yet here he is, even before the divine intervention, willing to bend the rules for the sake of compassion.

Then he had a dream and God told him that he could do more, and so he did. He chose to extravagant compassion. He risked his own dignity, his own family line, his own honor so that he could be a part of this incredible thing God was doing. He submitted himself not only to God, but to Mary's clear calling. He chose a better path, and it was a path that was outside the lines of traditional "righteousness." His choice was outside the parameters of the Law.

Sometimes being righteous means that we make choices that are outside the traditional understanding of the word. Sometimes the righteous color outside the lines. I have made the point many times that in the Gospel of Luke it is clear that Jesus is Mary's boy. Jesus, the one who declared "*He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners*" (Luke 4:18) was raised by Mary who declared "[God] has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly." (Luke 1:52). Now I remember that Jesus who proclaimed "You have heard it said... But I say to



"What I find most interesting is that the angel doesn't command Joseph; instead he simply says, 'Don't be afraid.' He essentially says: 'Don't be afraid of the social stigma. Don't be afraid to become a parent through adoption. Don't be afraid to experience a love greater than you have ever known. Don't be afraid to make the courageous choice, the one that will not only change your life, but the lives of Mary and Jesus and so many generations who will come after you.'"

— from the artist statement for "The Courageous Choice" by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity | @sanctifiedart

you" (Matthew 5) was raised by the man who was righteous but did instead what was right.

The righteous sometimes choose compassion over law. They choose love over honor. They risk themselves for the sake of others. They follow God's call instead of tradition. They submit themselves to the powerful call of others. The righteous choose a better way. May it be so with us as well.