



First United Methodist Church
504 Jackson Street
Reynoldsville, Pennsylvania 15851-1356
www.fumcreynoldsville.org
(814) 653-8593

Christmas 2017

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. – Matthew 1.19 (NIV)
Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced. – Matthew 1.19 (MSG)



Although Joseph is here described as ‘righteous’ or ‘noble,’ I have always thought of him as a man deeply in love with Mary. The inner conflict he must have felt between his commitment of love and passion for Mary over against a sense of hurt and betrayal upon discovering her pregnancy (knowing that it could not possibly be his own child) must have been heartbreaking. And yet, even in the midst of this turmoil, he was choosing to be sensitive and tender toward her, not wanting ‘to expose her.’

I am reminded of what the apostle Paul wrote about love in 1 Corinthians 13: “love is not arrogant, boastful or rude, it does not insist on its own way.” This story raises in my mind a question, not just for Joseph, Matthew, or Paul, but for all of us: Is this what it means to say Joseph was ‘righteous’? Is righteousness something much deeper than the common perception of being ‘morally straight’: much more than doing what is ‘right’ and avoiding the ‘wrong’ of evil, but willing to lay aside one’s own hurt, anger, pain, and discouragement to do what is most ‘noble’ – that is, what is most loving of another?

And finally, that leads me to one other question: Is this not precisely how Jesus, the One whose birth and life we celebrate as beginning at Bethlehem in the humility of a stable; is this not how he lived, suffered, and died – not merely content to do what was ‘right’ and avoid the ‘wrong’ of evil, but willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of loving not those who have always lived God’s way, but even for those – for all of us – who so often fail to live as God desires, not merely in ways that no one but we ourselves know about, but even when we fail spectacularly for all to see?

When I pause to consider the trouble (and perhaps there is no better word for it) God has taken to make known to us in no uncertain terms the height and depth and breadth and length of that love that does not let us go, I am simply amazed. Amazed by a love which not only ripped open the heavens to come down and be Emmanuel, God-with-us, but to be that love which works upon us and within us, calling us out of our self-centered lives, as it did Joseph, to lives that are so centered in God that the arrogance, pride, and even rudeness of so much selfishness releases their grip on us in exchange for the grip of God: a self-giving love for all.

Merry Christmas from your Parsonage Family,

Tom & Leah Carr

Have a case of the holiday “blues”? Come, join in a Blue Christmas service (also sometimes called a “Longest Night” service – held on the longest night of the year) on Thursday, December 21, 2017 at 7:00 PM. This will be a gentler service remembering the hope, comfort, and grace Jesus brought with his birth in Bethlehem.

Sunday, December 24th, we will celebrate the Fourth Sunday in Advent during our morning worship services at 8:15 and 10:45, and we will celebrate Christmas Eve at 7:00 PM. Come join our joyful celebration of the birth of Jesus!