



December 21 – Walking Together

As I moved to Des Moines several years ago, I reached out to some people that I knew in the metro area. Among them was the Fuller family whom I had met at Family Camp at Lutheran Lakeside. I began to spend time with Jenie, and eventually spending time Allison. I thought that being one of 11 children prepared me for such a reality. I was wrong. I was out of my depth.

I remember vividly the first time I watched Allison on my own. I was in a constant state of prayer. I was so scared she was going to get hurt. She was only 3 and seemed so fragile. I learned that this time of prayer was warranted. I learned that whenever someone other than the primary caregiver watches someone, there is a much higher likelihood that something goes wrong. You do not know what will go wrong. You only know that something bad is bound to happen on your watch.

In the 14 years since, I like to think that I have made some progress. I learned to follow Allison's lead in terms of navigating parenthood with a daughter who is mine through marriage. I learned that I am bound to make mistakes. I have grown into the role of Dad. I have been changed for the better, because I was welcomed to walk alongside this beautiful family.

I see the story of Joseph much differently than I did before moving to Des Moines. Joseph is anxious, and I get it. There are risks involved. He and Mary are both risking their lives by staying together. Having a child outside of wedlock was a punishable offense, for both. Joseph is struggling.

The angel appears for Joseph in a dream. Throughout much of Scripture, dreams are the setting for the prophetic voice. I believe that is also true today. The angel reminds Joseph that God is at work. Notice what is not asked of Joseph. He is not asked to "fix" things. He is not asked to "save" Mary and Jesus from shame. He is invited to walk with them.

Mary and Joseph are both in danger as this story unfolds. Instead of trying to flee, they decide to face everything together. I am not sure how well they knew each other before their marriage. Most marriages were arranged at that time and place. I do believe that this time of anticipation, the time of pregnancy, was a time that changed both for the better. They both learned to walk by faith in hope.

There is an old proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This is a good summary of the relationship between Mary and Joseph. They chose to walk together by faith. There were times when Joseph needed encouragement. There were times it was Mary in need of support.

This last summer, I traveled with Allison to Phoenix for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. It was a great experience. In the middle of the week, I found myself sitting in awe. This young girl that I was so scared to watch is now this confident young woman. I watched as she addressed the gathered assembly, claiming her voice. I sat in awe at the youth and young adults that were guiding change. I sat in awe at the realization that the younger generation is going to lead this Church to a much better and brighter future. This won't happen right away. But I believe it will happen.

I find myself wondering if that was the experience of Joseph. Mary outlived Jesus. She saw it all. Joseph, we believe, died before Jesus' ministry began. Did Joseph look at Jesus during those early years with a sense of awe and wonder? Did he look at the 12-year-old Jesus who was lost in the temple and catch a glimpse of what would be? Did he live long enough to see any of this taking shape? We don't know.

Today's lesson tells us what we need to know. Joseph and Mary walked together. They supported one another along the way. God continued to pave the way for both. May we look at those around us the same way. We are not asked to fix things or save things. We are inviting to walk alongside one another, and God will lead the way. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt