

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: Advent 2016: "A Long Awaited Hope"

Sermon Title: "Naming Hope"

Sermon Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Listeners Journey: I want my listener to have the courage to name what feels out of control in their lives and frame the way they look at their future with hope.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Naming people and things is tricky business. *Scary* business. If for no other reason because words carry meaning and when we name something we are taking the risk of bringing clarity to what the person or thing means now and what it is going to mean in the future.

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Some observation here:

- First, Joseph felt so out of control with his life circumstances that it took an angel from God to convince him to not send his fiancé' away.
- Second, and biblical scholars point this out, in Joseph's time it was the responsibility of the legal father to name their child and establish the official status of family line. Matthew points out that Joseph was a "son of David", a phrase indicating his family lineage linked all the way back in Jewish history to famous King David, through whom it had been foretold a messiah would come. So, it was Joseph's adoption of Jesus, a child not of his conception, that designated Jesus as a "son of David" as the Hebrew tradition had promised.¹
- Next, Joseph gave his adopted child the name "Yeshua" or "Jesus", which is the Greek name for "Joshua" which means "God Saves."²
- And, finally, when sowing together all of the gospel narratives about Jesus' birth we know that his name and the proclamation of his birth was as grass roots and community based as it gets—shepherds, innkeepers and family members. The meaning of Jesus' name would only come to mean something over time as he walked the dusty roads of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee.

In all of this we have to acknowledge and admire the courage of Joseph to go against the grain of pretty much everything in his world including his family's traditions and religion, in order to do the right thing, which was taking Jesus as his own, and name him for what he meant at his birth, and what he would become in the future that was yet to be lived. This is important: To name something is to frame its meaning now and for the unseen future. This is what Advent is all about.

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It is cleansing to simply name things for what they are, even if they are a complicated mess like the predicament that Joseph found himself in. It is important to simply stop and name what we are feeling. Just call it out: "I'm tired and need more rest...and something has to give." "This relationship is toxic and needs to come to an end." "The business deal I have spent months on may be good for me personally, but bad for everyone else and unethical." "I am addicted to this thing that is ruining my life." Or, "I don't have what I need to succeed in my work and need to go back to school."

¹ France, R.T.. The Gospel of Matthew (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 48). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

² <http://biblehub.com/greek/2424.htm>

Like Joseph had outside help, though, we also need outside perspective to get an accurate read on reality. Just as it took an angel and no doubt Mary's direct input to inform what Joseph ultimately decided to do, so we should never frame what we think reality is on our own because feelings are temporary and can cloud our vision and sometimes can be downright wrong,

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I recently studied a provocative interpretation and call to hope regarding the New Testament idea of the "Second coming of Christ" where Scripture texts typically get framed in the negative. Jesus and the Apostle Paul discussed the presence of God coming to us in Christ, in the "now" and, mystically, at a very distant unknown time perhaps as dramatic as the origins of the universe with the big bang. Jesus first, then Paul in reflection used the metaphor of God coming like a "surprise thief"³

Without getting too deep in the weeds I need to say that the theology of the second coming of Christ is a very complex topic that typically goes in two directions in Advent: one direction is an escapist and "turn or burn the world is coming to an end tomorrow" direction that is life sucking, environment trashing, and short sighted. The second direction is total avoidance of the topic of the return of Christ because of the turn or burn direction and because it is a wildly complex topic that has been debated throughout Christian history and only recently (like the last 100 years) has become a sensationalized topic that sells fictional books and movies.

I am captivated by Christian voices⁴ that interpret the "thief in the night" metaphor seeking to engage a more holistically framing of the nature of God in time and space. God as creator and lover of all is not the kind of thief that comes to harm and steal something from us, but rather, God is a "Divine Surprise" more like a cat burglar who shows up, sometimes silently and tip toing, seeking to disrupt our false thinking and embrace us with unfettered love. And, the intention is that God seeks to steal that which we do not need so that we are more free to lean into that which gives life, and hope, and love.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. What have you had to "name" in your life? Was it easy or difficult? (Personal sharing)
2. When reading the account of Joseph, what sticks out to you and why? (Exploring the text)
3. What needs to be "named" in your life right now? (Application)

³ Luke 12:32-40 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.

⁴ <https://cac.org/the-divine-thief-in-the-night/> and <http://www.jasonstaples.com/bible/misinterpreted-bible-passages-4-that-day-will-come-like-a-thief/> (accessed 12-17-16)