
"The Call at Midnight "

Sermon Text: Romans 1:1-7 / Matthew 1:18-25
Mariner Sands Chapel

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This is the fourth week of the season we call Advent. While it seems that the focus is on Christmas, there is more to look forward to; namely the next return of Jesus to Earth. Advent is a call to look to the future. And the future is tied to our present condition. And our present condition is tied to our past; how we got here. Advent is tied to Christmas because in Jesus we get a glimpse of what God has for us in the future. God gives us hope in our present situation because our past is filtered through incomplete experiences.

One of the two passages cited in today's scripture lesson is Matthew. The verses we look at today describe the year of trouble for one young Jewish man, Joseph. The Springtime starts out fine because he is in love with a young girl, Mary. We know from Matthew 13 that his profession is a builder, or a furniture maker. Every day at work, his mind is on Mary. He thinks about her all the time, dreams about her, and has one-on-one conversations with his dad to talk with Mary's dad about marriage. Both families agree to the union and they are betrothed, or engaged. Mary is in love too. Joseph is the whole package; he is funny, good looking, spiritual, strong hands. But summer comes and their relationship takes a turn. Mary is pregnant and everyone knows. Joseph is faced with a problem. His love for her has been interrupted by an event that is out of his control. It is hard to disbelieve her account. Every day he carries the same worry, "What am I going to do?" Or better, "How can I divorce this girl that I love? If I break up now, she will be disowned and forsaken. If what she says is true, I am doing this to God." He thinks hard about it and decides to get a bill of divorce without a reason, so that she doesn't have to live with the legacy of being an adulteress. He will take the blame of course, but Mary can go on. There are no verses in Scripture that record even one word from Joseph. The text says an angel appears to him in a dream and tells him to take Mary anyway, he is going to have a son, and will name him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sin. The angel tells him about this boy's birth, his name, and his work. And so, righteous Joe Carpenter obeys and does what God says. He responds to God's call on his life with faith and trust. Then, it gets worse. There's a taxation, a walk of walk of a hundred miles with a third trimester woman, and the couple is truly homeless in Bethlehem.

The second passage is Paul's introduction to the Romans. A servant of God, called to be an apostle. In a similar way, God initiates the process, disrupting a righteous man's career, and calling him to set himself apart for a whole new role, to serve in the interests of God. Specifically the gospel which is centered in Jesus, God's Son, who is the central figure in the game plan for the reconciliation of lost humanity. Verse 3 declares the Son's humanity, verse 4 proclaims His deity. It is the resurrection that sets Jesus apart and authenticates His claim to deity. Paul uses three prepositional phrases to declare Jesus as God: in power, with the spirit of holiness, and by a resurrection of dead persons. That is how the Angel represented Jesus to Joseph. This miraculous pregnancy has a powerful status. The second phrase refers to Christ's own inner spirit; it is pure in the Spirit of holiness. And the boy's purpose is to save or resurrect the dead-in-sin world with salvation. Verse 4 ends with He is our Messiah, redeemer and Lord. He did not come for the Jewish people alone, but for all people. The apostle Paul, responded in obedience and surrendered his life to God. Without a word being spoken, so did Joseph. So should we. To surrender is to obey. Obedience is the true measure of a person's faith. Apart from a changed life, there is no real faith.