

Sunday, December 18, 2016 - All Things New: Release the Outcome

Matthew 1:18-25 CEB

Marysville United Methodist Church

Pastor Jenny Smith

Follows the children's Christmas story

Review the contemplative stance - show up, pay attention, cooperate with God, release the outcome.

Today we're going to talk about how we get stuck when it comes to loving people. We'll connect with Joseph's part in this story and talk about releasing the outcome. Then we'll end with a video highlighting the journey we've taken this Advent.

Out of all the steps in our contemplative stance, releasing the outcome is often the hardest. We love predictable outcomes, controlled steps and results. Releasing the outcome is pretty much un-American. But it is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus. Let go, surrender, trust, give it all away, follow. There's not much that's predictable and safe about following Jesus. Sometimes I love that. Sometimes I really really struggle with that.

Imagine a situation in your life right now where you are hoping for a certain outcome. You've got an image in your head of how it should be.

However, planning for a certain outcome often keeps us from loving the person in front of us. We get stuck on this image of how "it's supposed to be." And we miss the messy reality of the human life right in front of us.

So sometimes, the very best way to love the person in front of us is to release the outcome. It may still turn out like you hoped. It may not. But I guarantee you will learn something about trust and dependence on God in the process. You might learn to love someone in a new way when you release the outcome. Somedays I wonder if love and control can coexist.

By the way, releasing the outcome doesn't mean we abdicate responsibility or don't care about a result. For me, when I choose to release the outcome, it means I care so much that I want to trust God with the relationship or situation more than myself.

So back to that situation you might be imagining. Hold that person in your mind. Picture how you want it to turn out. Spend time this week naming that you are hoping for a certain outcome. Own that. Then spend time with God asking for help to let it go. Leave space for a new possibility to be born. Release the outcome. This is the work of Christmas. Receiving Jesus in a new way. Receiving love in a new way.

Joseph released the outcome. I'm sure it wasn't easy. His first child wasn't who he expected. It didn't happen how he planned. He didn't even get to have sex! But he trusted this angel, a messenger with good news. I suppose Joseph could have ignored the angel and called off his engagement to Mary. Jesus still would have been born. God would have still found a way to be with us. But Joseph's willingness to listen and trust kept him in the story. He sensed he was part of something bigger than himself. Joseph could have been a minor character who was left in the dust because he walked away in anger and confusion. But he stayed in the story. And we get to see Joseph raise the Son of God.

And that's what happens when we release the outcome as a church. We realize we're apart of something bigger than us. Our personal preferences can take a backseat to our larger purpose as a faith community.

Today, I want to share with you a video from Elaine Heath, a mentor of mine, who first shared this way of seeing the world with me.

Elaine's video - <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/a-contemplative-stance>

How will our world know this good news is true? We have to see someone who lives like it's true. And then we become convinced that it's true.

This is Christmas! Our world of hurt, pain and fear is looking for a story that's true. But they have to see it in our lives first. What a joy and incredible task for us to live in a way that gives others hope. Amen!