

Isaiah 7:10-16

Matthew 1:18-25

Romans 1:1-7

“Restore us, O God; let your face shine,
that we may be saved.” AMEN!

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas!”

We have come to the fourth week in Advent
and “it’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas!”

Not only in our decoration but finally
in our texts assigned for today.

It finally feels like what the commercials are saying...

It’s Christmas!

But they’ve been doing it since Thanksgiving,
or even sooner.

But, to get the Christmas Eve or
Christmas Day sermon,

you’ll have to come on those days or
watch the live stream.

It is still Advent on December 18, 2022,
even though it’s beginning to look like Christmas.

And we begin with the question:

What would you do? (Pause)

You are engaged to be married.

Excited, giddy with anticipation and
then you find out your “partner-to-be” is
pregnant.

T-R-I-P-O-F-U-Y

The Rug Is Pulled Out From Under You.

Obviously, there’s break of commitment and promise.

A stab in the back;
a breech of trust.

And to top it off there is
this asinine explanation.

But all you can hear is... all you can feel is
the betrayal and disappointment in your throat...
and in the pit of your stomach.

You didn’t do anything wrong and
the person you believe to have
cheated looks more radiant than
you’ve ever seen.

So, obviously confused and hurt,
you do not know what to do.

People are going to expect you to do something.

Save your pride, punish the offender,
do something!

They'll whisper about you and avoid you.

Take their business elsewhere.

And you didn't even do anything wrong.

You're the victim,
for God's sake! (Sigh)

The older I get the more
I've come to accept... life is messy.

When you're young and dumb...
like I was... it seemed so clear...
it was take, take, take.

Be the best "whatever"...
drive the best car... have the best job...
and above all, demand respect...

maybe you were better, and

you were not like I was, but it is
something that a lot of people go through,
this mess called life.

I think many of us find ourselves in
Joseph's shoes at one time or another.

It may not be in the dealing with a partner's
mysterious pregnancy... or maybe it is.

It is the time of finding the spark of God
growing in someone
to whom we are promised, and

watching them change before our eyes
in ways that we'd never planned.

When this happens,
our lives are upset.

There's disorientation and confusion...
and maybe even some hurt
by what feels like betrayal.

Your spouse wants to change careers
just when you're getting in control of finances;

your child changes their major just as
they were about to enter their last year

or they drop out altogether;

a friend leaves the church or
siblings feel distant from one another
now that life has taken them on
different paths.

Life is messy. (Sigh)

When people we love change in ways
that we did not expect -
it can be hard, even harder than
changing ourselves. (Pause)

The words, “It’s not fair!”

Slip from our mouths.

And while they hang in the air, today,
we remember Joseph.

Here’s someone who never would have said,
that “God played fair.”

Never.

He would never have claimed
that life wasn’t messy.

Even for people whom the Bible calls righteous!

Whatever that means. :-)

Actually, we know what that meant.

It meant he could do whatever he wanted
in response to what had happened to Mary.

He had all the power; he could have stepped on
or stepped away from Mary and
probably would have, if God had
not intervened.

In a dream.

But really, it's just that God reminded Joseph,
that when you love someone...
life can get messy.

We really don't know a lot about Joseph,
the husband of Mary, the step-dad of Jesus,

but we do know that he listened and
then tried to respond to God's intervention
even when it didn't come naturally.

There's another thing that might seem
like the rug pulled out from under you.

At least to a person like me.

See, most of us think that success means
making responsible decisions;
feigning control.

Like ones that lead to moving when success comes.

To bigger homes in gated communities.

(Introduce Adrian Fogelin,
for ministry minute speech)

It is no small task to listen to God and
then try to respond to God's intervention.

Joseph's story (and Adrian's) reminds us that
bringing to life the spark of God in
a suffering world is risky, and messy,
and can even be dangerous.

Yet, when we welcome God's transforming work
into the lives of those around us and
witness change and growth,

we come to find that before our
very eyes are amazing rewards.

The reward is we find ourselves,
as a midwife on a cold and dark night,

we just may find ourselves accompanying another
who carries Christ within them.

We just might find ourselves with the child
in our arms and welcomed;
protected and nurtured.

It's messy.

It's not easy, people will whisper,
and it will likely break our hearts wide open.

Yet, what else is there to do in these
last days of Advent,
but go and look for Mary?

AMEN!