

The Christmas Touch pt. 2 THE TOUCH of FAMILY

Matthew 1:18-25

CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME TO BE FAMILY.

INTRODUCTION:

Rick and Judy Armstrong had a hectic holiday schedule encompassing careers, teenagers, shopping, and all the required doings of the season. Realizing that she would be short of time, she had the stationer print their signature on their Christmas cards, instead of signing each one.

Soon they started getting cards from friends signed "The Modest Morrisons," "The Clever Clarks," and "The Successful Smiths." Then she discovered the stationer's subtle mistake. She had mailed out a hundred cards neatly imprinted with "Happy Holidays from the Rich Armstrongs."

I'm sure they laughed their way through that mistake. But sometimes, during this time of the year, when things do go wrong, it is easy to throw up our hands and say, "What is the use?" It just seems to be too much.

Have you ever wanted to skip Christmas?

There is no doubt that Christmas can be a time of stress rather than peace. There is a touch of irony in that, isn't there? I mean... Isn't it amazing that we show the least amount of tolerance during a time that is to be distinguished by peace?

Do you know what the best part of Christmas is?
It is being together with members of your family.

Do you know that the worst part is?
It is being together with members of your family.
It would be funny if it wasn't true.
Right?

Well, we know that Christmastime is family time. But sometimes there is a lot of stress when it comes with being with family. Those imperfections become difficult to digest. In fact, because of past mistakes in our relationships, the relationships may be more known for anger, heartache and confusion rather than peace and good will. Interestingly, those characteristics were something that Joseph experienced as well.

He knew anger, heartache and confusion.

It is Joseph who we are studying this morning, and so... let's look at Joseph and see if that will help us understand how to handle this Christmas dilemma.

I. Let's begin by looking at the SITUATION (18).

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 1:18)

- A. The Bible tells us that Mary was found to be with child.
 - 1. If the fact of her pregnancy wasn't shocking enough, the explanation was even worse!
- B. It also tells us that Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.
 - 1. This pledge was a great deal more formal than our engagement period is today.
 - 2. If during that period a woman became pregnant, it was viewed as adultery.
- C. Joseph was faced with a crisis of betrayal.
Which leads us to...

II. Looking at the second stage, SEPARATION.

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. (V. 19)

- A. We must temper justice with mercy.
 - 1. Joseph was a spiritually sensitive man that was committed to doing the right thing in every circumstance.
 - 2. So when he decides what he has to do about Mary's pregnancy, it is his goal to not embarrass or disgrace her..
- B. How are we at tempering our justice with Mercy.
Especially when it comes to family

Next we come to...

III. Then we must listen for God and discover the SECRET.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (20)

- A. Can you imagine having a dream when you are told, in effect, to wake up?
 - 1. "Joseph, Wake up!" You've been drafted!
 - 2. Joseph was now learning a valuable lesson that would carry Him for a lifetime.

- B. These lessons don't always come easy.
 - 1. Fear can cause us to react humanly instead of Godly.

IV. Which can bring us SATISFACTION.

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

- A. Joseph discovered he was part of a bigger plan.
 - 1. He was instructed to give this baby a name. Joshua or Jesus
 - 2. And Joseph was to name Him because this son was going to save His people from their sins.
 - 3. It is so easy to forget the meaning of the season.
 - 4. There was a group of third graders who got together and decided to write their own version of the Nativity. It was more modern than the traditional drama. There were the familiar members of the cast: Joseph, the shepherds, and an angel propped up in the background. But Mary was nowhere to be seen.
 - 5. Suddenly behind the bales of hay could be heard some loud moans and groans. Evidently Mary was in labor. Soon the doctor arrived dressed in a white coat with a stethoscope around his neck. Joseph, with a look of relief on his face takes the doctor straight to Mary, then starts pacing back and forth. After a few moments the "doctor" emerges with a big smile on his face. "Congratulations, Joseph," he says, "It's a God."
 - 6. Well, that was the message the angel was giving Joseph as well.

V. Which brings us to a natural conclusion SERVICE.

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (24-25)

- A. The dream works and Joseph is convinced.
 - 1. He chooses to love and understand
 - 2. He tenderly chooses to care for Mary..
- B. Responding to problems we face don't always turn out the way we would like them to.
 - 1. Joseph was willing to sacrifice his own hopes, dreams and plans for his life.
 - 2. And keep his commitment to Mary and God.
- C. How do we and how should we react when someone let's us down,

especially those we love the most.

1. Are we willing to put them in God's hands and trust him.
 - a. When we do they can become our greatest blessing.
2. I have also had to work with that, with in my own family as many of you are aware.
3. It's hart braking when things like that happen.
4. But we too must learn to trust in god to see us through it, and to wait for the good to come.

So...please note this...

CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME TO BE FAMILY.

Notice, I didn't say that Christmas is a time for family. Christmas is a time to be family. It is an important distinction.

Many of us are going to spend time looking for just the right gift for someone we care about, whether it is for a spouse or children, parents, or perhaps a really good friend.

The gift will be a demonstration of our love for them.

Many of us will gather for Christmas and spend time with grandparents, uncles and aunts, and cousins. I mean...what would this most special of holidays be without extended relatives? Perhaps you shouldn't answer that!

God wants us to love our family members even when we feel disappointed or let down by them.

Why? Because, like Joseph, it is time to be family.

The example of Joseph challenges us to not look out for our own interests, but to the interest of those who we call family.

We must follow the example of Joseph by seeking for ways to love each other. Please allow me to close with the following story.

She looked shabby and cold and old as she stood at the freeway exit holding a sign that read "Homeless, need food and a coat" the lady driving by intended to keep going but couldn't help but feel God was telling her to stop. She had seen many homeless beggars around the area and had never stopped before, she had been fearful, but this was different for some reason. As she got out of her car the lady approached, her shabby appearance was off set by her soft yet deep set brown eyes, and she looked much younger than she had first appeared. She began to reach for her purse when she felt God say, give her your coat. She almost stepped back in her car, it had been an early Christmas present from her husband, Christmas was only a couple of weeks away but it had turned cold so he gave it to her early. How could she give away something that had been given to her out of love and even sacrifice. What would he say, but God's voice was clear. As the lady approached

she shared her first name to which the lady said that her name was Lori. Then after a few minutes of chit chat she took off the coat and handed it to her. She wanted to get back into her warm car and head home trying to think how she would tell her husband, but that wasn't meant to be, because just then a local newspaper reporter pulled up and stopped with his camera. Neither lady wanted to be pictured but he was insistent as he took a picture of them together. The lady from the car shuddering in the cold, the homeless lady still very unkept but wearing a new blue coat. The next Sunday the paper carried the picture of the good Samaritan along side the homeless lady and the story that the reporter had dug out. She would see this lady a couple of more times with her sign and her now not so clean coat, and would always wave and receive a smile in return. Soon it was Christmas Eve and everyday she looked for the lady but never saw her again. Maybe she thought, she had found a shelter to stay in or even found her way home for Christmas. She felt good about being able to share just a little warmth with Lori. Then came the early part of March and a picture of Lori, her coat and her sign was on the front page of the Sunday addition and a story of how she was found murdered without the coat. They weren't even sure when she had been murdered. It may have been before Christmas as she didn't call her sister like she normally would. Was it for her coat, was it her estranged husband just out of prison and angry because she had left trying to make a better life. No one would ever know.

Now let me share with you the rest of the story. Lori had grown up in MN in a very nice family. She had a loving mother who loved God and would do anything for you, a soft spoken father and two brothers and a sister all older. At the age of 12 she started hanging around the wrong crowd and started drinking, she would later say she became an alcoholic after her first sip of beer. She had two children when by the time she was 22 and adopted them out to a family member. She would often say that was the only good decision she had ever made. When her mother died of cancer she came to her funeral drunk. Time and time again she broke her father's heart and pushed her family away. He finally considered her as dead because it was easier than facing heart break again and again. She spent time in the women's prison in Shakopee, and time and time again went through treatment in Fergus Falls and Jamestown. When she was sober she was the sweetest girl you could ever have known, but then she would meet some loser and end up drinking and doing drugs again until she ended up in jail. Finally she met a real loser and married him. Since he had a warrant out for his arrest they left MN and moved to California. No one in her family knew where she had gone until they got the message of her murder. Her husband got into trouble shortly after arriving and was put in prison and Lori not knowing what to do headed for Washington State, which is where she would die. She would have probably gone home, but for her guilt. Her family including her dad would have accepted her back even though she had broken their hearts so many times. They all needed the touch of family, especially

that Christmas but it was not to happen.

Why you may wonder how I know so much about this story? Lori was my cousin, whom I had loved and reached out to many times until she left and went out west. Her mother was my absolute favorite aunt, and when I read the story it broke my heart. I would have given anything to have seen her one more time and reached out to her. I'm so thankful for the lady that gave her the coat, even though it didn't change the outcome it helped her to know that somebody cared, and that God loved her. I have always hung on to the hope that God's love reached her before it was too late, and that she come to know that love in those final days.

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in the community of Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.

Christmas is a time to love.

Perhaps it will be a relative that needs your love.

Perhaps it is someone that is in your extended family called the church.

Wherever this person is, touch them with God's love.

Look out for their interests and needs, just as Joseph did for Mary and also, as Jesus did for us.

Remember Christmas is the time to touch.