

Sunday, December 18, 2011
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – "God is Here"

Have you ever received news that was so unexpected, so alarming, that you felt that your world had literally been turned upside down?

Do you know that sensation of being somewhat out of control for a brief time-dizzy perhaps-as you get your bearings and take a deep breath?

You grab onto the chair and say, "ok, I can handle this."

It will be alright.

Well, in today's reading from Matthew I picture Joseph having that kind of an experience.

As far as we know Joseph was a good man, an honest man, betrothed to a young woman who has told him she is pregnant.

This is not the kind of news that one can take lightly in first century Nazareth.

The implications for both Mary and Joseph are dire.

We have no account of the conversation between Joseph and Mary, and we can only suppose that Joseph perhaps asked for a bit of time to think things over.

As he went about his work that day, he carried this news in his heart.

He undoubtedly had conversations with himself about what to do.

He might have berated himself for being a poor judge of character.

Maybe he prayed.

Maybe, before he went to bed that night he asked God for guidance, for help, for support.

We do know that an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

And we know that he believed that angel.

We know that he went forward with his plans and provided a place, a family for Jesus Christ to be born and to grow up.

Joseph is this week's hero.

He is this week's superstar because he listened to God.

He trusted God.

He went out on a limb – defied conventional wisdom – broke through cultural boundaries and allowed the world to welcome our Lord and Savior.

I want to be like Joseph.

I want to be able to stand my ground, no matter what people say.

I want to be brave enough to witness to my love of God in a society that would rather not listen.

I want to proclaim the good news in the public square.

Last week’s Sunday New York Times Sunday Review section carried two interesting stories.

The first was a column by Frank Bruni about the football quarterback, Tim Tebow.

Tebow is a young player who has led his team, the Denver Broncos, on a recent winning streak.

He has gained notoriety by attributing his success to God.

As an evangelical Christian, Tebow comfortably thanks his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ at postgame news conferences.

Additionally, he has adopted a practice of getting down on one knee and praying on the football field.

The practice has come to be called “tebowing” and is defined as a verb meaning:

“to get down on a knee and start praying, even if everyone else around you is doing something completely different.”

Mr. Bruni concludes his article with this: “The Broncos are the talk of the league. More and more people are watching. And you could indeed say they’re tuning in to find out how far God can take a team.”

Two pages later there was an opinion piece by Eric Weiner entitled “Americans: Undecided About God?”

The author lamented the state of our country’s attitude toward God.

He cited the oft-repeated statistics about the percentage of people who identify themselves as having no religious affiliation, the “Nones.”

He hedges with the defense that 93 percent of the population believe in God, they just don’t like the religious landscape.

Their spiritual needs are not met in church.

He said “All we see is an angry God, constantly judging and smiting. Precious few of our religious leaders laugh. They shout.”

He longed for a religion free from “raw superstition.”

He professed that the “Nones” are seeking a new way of being religious.

He suggested that we needed a “Steve Jobs of religion,” an entrepreneur who could provide religion in a straightforward, unencumbered, intuitive way.

He called for a religious community that would celebrate doubt, encourage experimentation and allow one to utter the word “God” without embarrassment.

I had some fun this week picturing Mr. Weiner in a conversation with Joseph.

I pictured Joseph asking Mr. Weiner if he had ever had an encounter with God.

I imagined Joseph talking about his life being transformed by God’s amazing grace and steadfast love.

I could hear Joseph saying that his life as a devout Jew included conversations with rabbis about interpretation of the law for this day and time – for his particular situation.

Perhaps Mr. Weiner is more likely to have a conversation with Tim Tebow.

I believe it would sound something like Dr. Seuss’ *Green Eggs and Ham*.

As with most of Dr. Seuss’ books – there is a profound message in an entertaining package.

There are two characters, a small child-like creature called Sam-I-Am (Tebow) and a grouchy faced older character (Weiner).

It starts off with the grouchy faced fellow saying

“I do not like that Sam-I-Am.”

Then Sam-I-Am asks, “Do You Like Green Eggs and Ham?”

The Grouchy faced fellow says

“I do not like them, Sam-I-Am, I do not like green eggs and ham.”

Sam persists presenting all different situations to which the grouch negatively responds.

Toward the end, the grouch is growing exasperated with his declarations that he simply does not like Green Eggs and Ham under any circumstances.

The little fellow persists but the grouch holds fast to his position that there are no circumstances under which he would eat green eggs and ham:

I could not, would not, on a boat.

I will not, will not, with a goat.

I will not eat them in the rain.

Not in the dark! Not on a train! Not in a tree! Not in a car!

I would not, could not, in a box.

I could not, would not with a fox.

I will not eat them with a mouse.

I will not eat them in a house.

I will not eat them here or there.

I will not eat them anywhere.

I do not eat green eggs and ham.

I do not like them, Sam-I-Am.

But Sam persists...

You do not like them.

So you say.

Try them! Try them!

And you may.

Try them and you may, I say.

The grouchy character, looking weary, agrees.

Sam! If you will let me be, I will try them. You will see.

And he tries the green eggs and ham – he smiles.

As you listen to his reply substitute “God and Church” for “Green Eggs and Ham.”

Say!

I like green eggs and ham!

I do! I like them, Sam-I-Am!

And I would eat them in a boat.

And I would eat them with a goat.

And I will eat them in the rain.

And in the dark. And on a train. And in a car.

And in a tree.

They are so good, so good, you see!

So I will eat them in a box and I will eat them with a fox.

And I will eat them in a house.

And I will eat them with a mouse.

And I will eat them here and there.

Say! I will eat them ANYWHERE!

I do so like green eggs and ham!

Thank you!

Thank you, Sam-I-Am.

A bit of Advent fun – but the point is this:

God is here.

God's son is here.

God's holy spirit is here.

They are here, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, waiting for you.

They are waiting for you to prepare the way for the world to receive them.

They are counting on you to resist the temptation to deny them.

They have promised you that if you listen, if you trust, if you have faith,

Their steadfast love will be yours.

Their abundant grace will be yours.

Peace on Earth will be yours.

What more could you possibly want?

er. Amen.