

Text: [Matthew 1:18-25](#)
Date: December 15, 2019 – 3rd Sunday of Advent
Title: Bethlehem Blockbusters 3: “Mary, Joseph & The Santa Clause: On Peace”
Theme: Finding God’s peace in difficult circumstances means making a conscious decision to trust God’s vision rather than our own.

Intro

We’ve been looking at some of the movies of Christmas and the themes of Advent

Elf, It’s a Wonderful Life – it’s been fun to re-watch those movies

Today we’ve got one that maybe not everyone has seen

Tim Allen’s 1994 movie *The Santa Clause*

And today we’re going to see what it has to teach us about peace

Not peace among nations, or even peace between people

But a kind of peace that’s even more fundamental – peace with ourselves & the lives God has given us to live

Question

How do you make peace with difficult circumstances?

1

Life has a strange way of defying our expectations, doesn’t it?

I imagine that for those of us who have at least a little experience in life, we’ve discovered time and time again that we never quite end up in the places where we expect

If you had told me 25 years ago that I would someday be a pastor living in New Jersey, I would have laughed

And I’m sure there are things about your life now that surprise you too

Many of our favorite stories are based on this idea – that life surprises us

The question is always: will we roll with things as they come at us, or will we fight against them?

And which is more likely a path to peace with ourselves and with others?

2

Today's movie takes this idea to an extreme
Scott Calvin, Tim Allen's character, is a toy salesman who surprises Santa,
accidentally causing him to fall off the roof of his house
Tragically, Santa dies in the accident (I know, kind of a horrible way to start
a movie!)

Of course, Santa can't die – someone has to keep delivering toys!
The card in Santa's pocket says: "Put on the suit. The reindeer will know
what to do."

What Scott doesn't know is....well, there's a lot of stuff Scott doesn't
know....

Let's take a look at the clip

<The Santa Clause clip: scene with Bernard the Elf at the North Pole where
he explains what the Santa clause is>

The whole rest of the movie consists of Tim Allen and the people in his life,
including his ex-wife and her new husband,
fighting against, then reluctantly accepting, then finally embracing his new
life – and everything that comes with it
All the milk and cookies, the weight gain, the white hair and beard, and the
responsibility of delivering joy to kids all over the world
It's a story about someone's life being completely upended, and the only
person having the vision to see how it might all be for the better being
a little kid - Scott's son

3

We spend a lot of time fighting against what is
Circumstances that didn't go our way
Opportunities we feel like we missed out on
Ways in which life hasn't met our expectations

I'd like for you to consider for a moment Mary and Joseph
The Christmas story has, at its heart, some real human drama
A crisis in a relationship that's far from a sitcom or a Hallmark movie

Luke tells the story from Mary's perspective
But Matthew focuses on Joseph's experience

Both of them point to a dilemma: an unexpected and difficult-to-explain pregnancy
A young woman's life totally upended
And a fiancé's decision to be made: whether or not to go through with a wedding

Now, this is a decision with big implications in any time & place
But particularly in the first century, the news the angelic messengers brought was downright dangerous

According to Deuteronomy 22, there was a distinct possibility that Mary might be stoned for adultery, or even – as we see in some places today – threatened by her own clan for besmirching the family's honor
And even if that didn't happen, there was another reality
If Joseph turned her away, the possibility of finding another husband – and security for this new baby – was remote
Her fate was in Joseph's hands

Matthew calls Joseph "righteous" – and, according to the standard of the time, NOT to call out something like adultery could hardly be considered righteous
That's why some translations say things like, "THOUGH he was righteous, YET he was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace"

Two people are putting their futures and their reputations on the line in order to carry out the will of God
Essentially, this is the moment where Joseph decides that it's he and Mary against the world –
And that Jesus would be raised as his son, no matter what
That they would trust in each other, and they would trust God's vision for their lives

4

This might be the hardest kind of peace for us to navigate
For most of us, there's a gap that exists
Between the lives we expected or wanted, and the lives we actually have

For some, maybe that's a positive difference – in other words, we feel blessed and grateful for the way things have worked out

Others may have their doubts
And find themselves fighting against where they are in life
Not unlike Tim Allen in the movie
Or, I'm sure, Mary and Joseph in their private moments when the Gospel
writers weren't looking
Like they walked into a set of circumstances they hadn't asked for or
wanted

And that's a hard place to be
Now I want to be careful in where I'm headed with this
I never want anyone to believe that we don't have choices to make
No matter what's happening with us
We ALWAYS have choice
It's never about saying, "here's where I am, I guess I just have to live with
it"

Mary and Joseph had choices
Joseph said, "I'll adopt the boy, he'll be my son"
Mary said, "Let it be with me, according to your word"
I know that SOUNDS passive, but I don't think it has to be
It was her decision to ACCEPT the work of God that was already unfolding
in her – to lean toward it rather than run away from it or fight it

Too often we get stuck in this gap between our circumstances and our
expectations
We get so focused on our circumstances rather than our response – on
the decisions we COULD make
To the point where we feel trapped, we feel stuck, and we're fighting
against our situation, which usually looks like:
Complaining, anxiety, and anger

And often we'll blame God for getting us into the mess
Or, maybe we'll find someone else standing nearby who seems convenient
Not ourselves, of course – never ourselves – because it's never our fault!

But if we are people of faith, it may all come back to God
Often what that sounds like is "why me, Lord?"
Have you ever said that?
If there's someone here who hasn't, I'd be surprised

I'm sure Mary and Joseph asked that question a lot
When they shared with their families what was going on, and were on the
receiving end of lectures, or threats
Or when people in the village whispered about them in voices just loud
enough for them to hear
When they had to flee to Egypt in order to escape Herod

Any one of these would be enough to make me want to bail on God's plan
many times over
It's that sense of pushing back against circumstances, a restlessness in our
souls that wants to get us free to call our own shots

5

But that's not how Mary and Joseph reacted
They embraced their role and moved forward, embracing God's vision for
their lives rather than their own
Then they made choices in response to their circumstances that were in
alignment with that vision

This is far from easy to do
Because it FEELS like giving up control
Remember, though, that embracing God's vision for us is itself a choice
God NEVER robs us of our ABILITY or RESPONSIBILITY to make a
decision

We can decide whether we want to play along
Whether we will try to see what God is telling us though our circumstances
How God wants to use us in our circumstances to serve others

This is where we find peace – in that DECISION to put our lives in God's
hands
Even when a gap exists between our real lives and our expectations
We know that we are in the hands of a God whose vision for us, and for the
world, is so much greater than we could ever ask or imagine

When we trust, we can finally stop fighting with ourselves, with God, and
with our circumstances

We always have choices - and we choose peace by choosing to trust

Amen.

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