

“Love Never Fails”

Matthew 1:18-25

Preached by Bob Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

Stone Mountain, Georgia

December 24, 2006

11:00 a.m.

It was one of my favorite parts of the recently released movie, “The Nativity.” Joseph and Mary were on their way out of the village of Nazareth to make the one hundred mile trek to Bethlehem. Caesar ordered a census and each male had to return to his place of birth with his family to register. In this scene, Mary was riding on a donkey and Joseph was walking alongside her.

By this time, the citizens of Nazareth have shunned Mary because they thought she had been promiscuous. She was going to have a baby and was not married. They would not talk to Mary or have anything to do with her any longer. Because Joseph stuck by her side, his good name and reputation tumbled just like Mary’s.

In this departing scene, the people watched as Mary and Joseph slowly made their way out of town. As they passed the people, most of them looked at Mary with contempt and deliberately looked away after catching a glance of her. No one waved, said goodbye or offered words of encouragement for the long journey.

As they passed the last person and headed out of town, Joseph said to Mary with a twinkle in his eye and a bit of sarcasm in his voice, “These people are really going to miss us.” Everyone in the theater laughed.

As I watched this particular scene in the movie it dawned on me. **The best way to reach out to someone that you love that is struggling is to walk alongside them.** This is what Joseph did for Mary. What an inspiring role model he is.

Who has done this for you? Who has walked with you “through the valley of the shadow of death so you would fear no evil?” You will never forget them, will you?

Who needs you to do this for them now? Who do you know that is struggling that needs companionship? Who is it that has been shunned and abandoned that needs a warm embrace and encouraging word? Who needs someone to walk alongside them when others turn their heads? Perhaps this is the gift you could give them for Christmas and the New Year. I cannot think of anything they need more.

What would it require of you to do this? What did it require of Joseph to walk alongside Mary? It took a lot of **courage**. He was traveling up stream in uncharted waters and was as frightened as Mary.

There was a scene in the movie when Mary and Joseph were alone around a camp fire while on this long journey to Bethlehem. Mary confesses her fear at having a baby, especially one in whom so many hopes reside. She looked at Joseph and asked, “Joseph, are you scared, too?” He simply replied, “Yes, Mary, I am.” To walk with Mary required a lot of courage on Joseph’s part.

It required **patience** as well. Answers were not going to come quickly. Solutions to their growing needs were not going to magically appear. Joseph, as well as Mary, was going to have to be comfortable with mystery. This would require a lot of patience.

It would also require **faith**. Joseph knew that he did not possess the ability to enter Mary's world and help her. At best he could do her no harm and put her away privately. This was why he decided not to accuse her unfaithfulness and have her stoned to death.

Entering her messy world and being frightened with her required faith, however. It demanded the kind of wisdom, strength, trust, generosity, patience and courage he did not possess. He knew where to find it, though. This righteous man was a man of strong faith.

What do you need in order to enter someone's messy world and walk alongside them? I am confident you need everything Joseph did and I am also confident that God will give these to you just as He gave them to Joseph. He wants us to be the presence of Christ in a broken world. As Anglican priest Brian McGowan wrote, "Discipleship is all about living out Emmanuel."

McGowan also said that for some, taking the high moral ground may mean walking away from those in a predicament, especially a sexual predicament. Joseph challenges us to reconsider that decision. So does the Apostle Paul.

"Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. Love never fails" I Corinthians 13:4-8a.

I wonder if Paul was thinking of Joseph when he penned these words. I wonder if anyone thinks of us when they read them.