

Fourth Sunday in Advent – 2019
Matthew 1:18-25

Delusions of grandeur – you know the phrase? Delusions of grandeur – technically, it's a psychological disorder. A delusion is a false belief held by a person. Grandeur is a word that means splendor or impressiveness. Delusions of grandeur are when an ordinary Joe believes that he is someone super fancy, super consequential, above everybody else. God likes ordinary Joes. Abraham Lincoln said this: "The Lord prefers common-looking people. That is why he made so many of them."

Delusions of grandeur – we use the phrase most commonly as a put-down. If someone is getting too big for his britches, if someone is cocky, full of himself, then we say that that poor sap has delusions of grandeur. It is an attempt to get that guy back down to earth. Whenever someone gets slapped with that zinger, we all instinctively take note and say to ourselves: "Let's make sure no one ever lobs that one at us." Delusions of grandeur – it's when a tabby cat looks in the mirror and sees Mufasa staring back. Two ladies, dear friends, are talking to each other – both have a gin and tonic in hand. The first lady says: "Delusions of grandeur make me feel a lot better about myself." The second lady nods, looks whimsically at her fingernails and replies: "I almost thought that I suffered from delusions of grandeur, then I realized that I was just super awesome."

Cocky people generally aren't too useful. Pride is a devastating vice, corrupting relationships, diminishing joy. Pride is antithetical to love. Arrogance gives off a foul aroma to others and, most egregiously, to God. The first shall be last. That is a Christological maxim that is at the center of our faith. The first shall be last. The holy cross makes that statement come alive. The Lord Christ did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). That reality invades the hearts and minds those whom God calls to Himself. It is beautiful to see – humility. It is beautiful to see – when one takes a modest view of one's own importance. Joseph is beautiful. Joseph is supremely useful. His relationships flourish. He is devout, obedient, and gracious – which is to say, full of grace. Joseph is a model of masculinity. Strong, uncomplicated, the backbone of a family.

Men should be uncomplicated. A pregnant fiancé... that is complicated. A fiancé pregnant with a child that is not your own... that is troublingly complicated. Mary no doubt was the one to break the news. Imagine! Anger, disappointment, and a wretched emptiness must have enveloped him. And he was conflicted. Joseph had no desire to hang a scarlet letter around Mary's neck. He was a just man, putting other's interests above his own, Mary's interests. Joseph was full of faith – that is what made him just. God's righteousness being credited to him as a gift. Freely he had received so freely he would give. There would be no public indictment, no public shame – he resolved to divorce her quietly (to protect her). It is reminiscent of the explanation of the 8th Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way." Love covers a multitude of sins and Joseph was going to cover this one as well as he could.

Divorce, however, was not to be. There was no sin here to cover. Incarnate Love, the eternal Son of the eternal God, was nestled in the womb of the Virgin (conceived by the Holy Spirit). Angelic gospel, uncomplicated and rich in purpose, came to the uncomplicated man who had no delusions of grandeur. “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Joseph doesn’t ask how. Joseph doesn’t pepper the angel with questions or bemoan his future or angle for perks – he acts. “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.” It is uncomplicated. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Such humility, such faithfulness is genuinely beautiful.

Contemporary man is a different sort of animal. Everything God says has to go through the filter of our intellect, our judgment, our reason, our schedule, our sensibilities, our matrix. Man, and here I am speaking of the male gender, man, by ignoring God and making himself master of his agenda, man has diminished himself as leader, man has made himself weak bordering on paralyzed. How else to describe this than delusions of grandeur run wild? One area to examine are our standards of behavior. Do you get your cues for your behavior from the unbelieving world or from God’s Word? We look to Him for our standards of behavior. It is not complicated. You cannot serve both your sinful flesh and God. Your flesh *has no* standards. Your fallen nature *has no* conscience. Follow these things and you will lose your character; you will lose true joy; you will lose those things which elevate life.

One diagnostic tool regarding your faith is whether you abandon God’s Word when it is inconvenient. Do you abide by God’s standards only when it is convenient, when it doesn’t upset what you really want to do? Joseph would be inconvenienced. I get the impression that that doesn’t matter much to him. “Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Remember, that is from James, Joseph’s son. I hear the echo of a father who taught his son what it means to be a man, what it means to be strong, to be a Christian.

The angel promised Joseph that Mary carried a son, a Savior. Give this child the name Jesus – Y’shua (Yahweh is salvation). Joseph was uncomplicated. He gave the child His Name – Jesus, the One who would save His people from their sins. “Get up, take the child and His mother and go.” Each time that message came to Joseph he took the child and His mother wherever he was told to go. What is a father but a protector? It is true. This Joseph did.

Blessed Joseph protected the One who would be his eternal protection. Humility was incarnated in the child Joseph raised. Here’s what the Bible says about Jesus: “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:3). True God, He hid His majesty beneath the form of a humble servant. God of God was born in a stable. He took the face of an ordinary Jewish man. He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. He was the first who gladly became last. As the last, He bore your sin. As the absolute last, He died, crucified, to save you. He is beautiful. His humility has animated the church for two thousand years, calling people to the heights of love, the heights of sacrifice, the heights of joy. Christ’s humility was alive in Joseph. It is beautiful to see. Our altar is beautiful to see. Humility is there... for you. The gifts of Christmas, the gifts of Good Friday, the gifts of Easter – love, forgiveness, life and salvation – it’s all there (to be received, to animate you). His body

and blood are not complicated. It is grace – full and free. Risen from the dead, the Lord of the Empty Tomb gives Himself to you without reservation.

Come Christmas, bring your cheer. Come now, Lord Jesus, bless us and make us your own. Give us your light and life and may hope be kindled among us – that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and in the breaking of the bread.