

December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025

## Matthew 1:18-25 “Give Me Your Hand”

Good morning. My name is Jesse, and I’m a fixer. Clinically and sociologically speaking, the word most often used is, “co-dependent.” But I don’t like that word because it sounds derogatory and I feel that it’s used to shame people. Let me back up a bit. When someone tells *me* that *I’m* being co-dependent, *I feel* like I’m being shamed. Also, I spent most of my life not really knowing what co-dependency even means. I thought it meant something like, “I can’t live without you,” which, you know, there’s a part of me that thinks, “Awww. That’s sounds kind of romantic, so call me guilty because I love my wife and I couldn’t imagine life without her.” But someone finally opened my eyes to what co-dependency means. It means you are more concerned about someone else’s problems than you are about your own. Uh-oh. And what do co-dependents do? They try to *fix* other people’s problems. And if the other person *lets* them and then starts to *rely* on that person to fix their problems, then you’ve got a co-dependent relationship. As Barbara Meade used to say, “Well crud.” Indeed. Hold on to that idea—not fixing, but *being present*—which isn’t a bad thing because it turns out that’s exactly what Joseph is doing in today’s story.

Let's look at our text for this week. Our theme for Advent this year is "hope instead of fear." And let me tell you, fear is all over Matthew's Christmas story—whether we notice it or not. You see it when Joseph plans to "dismiss Mary quietly." You hear it when the angel has to immediately say, "Do not be afraid." And you feel it in the world Jesus is born into—a fragile family, an unwed mother, and an empire that responds to threats with control and violence.

It's easy for us to overlook Joseph's *fear*, because the story moves so quickly to his *obedience*. But Joseph isn't calm or confident here—he's scared. Scared of public disgrace. Scared of religious judgment. Scared of what this could cost him. And we need to be honest about the stakes here. In a world where women could be punished—sometimes violently—for *suspected* adultery, Mary's pregnancy wasn't just embarrassing. It was dangerous.

So what Joseph does next is more than just "doing the right thing." He doesn't fix the situation. Joseph is *not* being codependent here. He doesn't make the danger disappear. He simply decides not to let Mary face it alone. In other words, he says, "I'll stay. I'll *share* the risk. Just give me your hand." When the angel tells Joseph, "Do not be afraid," it's not because there's nothing to fear. It's because God is already at work in this situation. God isn't

expecting Joseph to be a hero. Joseph is being invited to participate. See the difference?

In a world obsessed with power, reputation, and control, Joseph's choice to participate is radical, but in a quiet way. He sets aside the right that the law gives him to walk away without consequence. He chooses care over control. And that choice puts him right in the middle of what God is doing. This isn't just personal—this has consequences. A child who is already being referred to as "King of the Jews" is a threat to the powers that be. And as we all know, when empire feels threatened, it responds with fear and violence. But God responds differently. God responds with dreams, courage, and ordinary people willing to show up. There's that phrase I've been using all season -- "Willing to show up." *You* all get that. I know you do because you prove it every day.

Joseph becomes not just a guardian of Mary's dignity, but a protector of Jesus' life. We might imagine a quiet moment between Mary and Joseph. She has already said yes to God. But that yes didn't make her fearless. She *still* needs a companion. She *still* needs someone to walk beside her. And Joseph, moved by a divine whisper, reaches through his own fear to offer God's presence. This story is not just about them. It's also about us. There are people in our communities today who, like Mary, carry something secret and heavy— something that

puts them at risk. Maybe it's their identity, their truth, their calling, or even their hope. And there are others, like Joseph, who have more security, more safety, more voice.

Advent invites us to not simply “be not afraid,” but to act with love in the midst of fear. Not to fix everything, not to be codependents, but to show up with courage. To reach out and say: “Give me your hand.” This kind of love—rooted in risk, humility, and faith—is what Isaiah evokes when he writes: “Each one helps the other, saying to one another, ‘Take courage!... Do not fear, for I am with you.’” God’s work in the world unfolds not through lone heroes, but through the joined hands of those who choose—relationship over self-protection, accompaniment over certainty, and presence over perfection. Mary’s “yes” mattered. But so did Joseph’s. So does ours. And because our yes matters, I want to leave you with a few questions—not to answer today, but to live with this week.

- Have you noticed lately how much of the news we receive these days is driven by fear—fear that divides us and teaches us to distrust one another. Take a moment to think about a story or headline you’ve encountered recently that stirred fear toward a person or a group of people. What did that fear push you toward—withdrawal, suspicion, anger? Now think of a different moment—a time when fear didn’t isolate

you, but actually led to connection and support. What made the difference?

- Mary’s “yes” didn’t erase the danger she faced. Being pregnant out of wedlock still placed her at great risk. She needed Joseph to take her hand—to stand with her and help protect her and her child. In what ways might our church, or our wider community, be called to stand in solidarity with people who are vulnerable today?
- Okay, this one is entirely speculative. Imagine, for a moment, if Joseph had gone through with his plan to quietly dismiss Mary, which he had every right to do—would her child have survived? Would God have found another way? And what does that possibility tell us about how deeply God’s work in the world depends on ordinary people showing up and saying yes?

This week, we are not asked to fix the world. We’re asked to take each other’s hands and walk forward into it—together. And friends, as we carry that invitation with us this week—I hope you’ll join us here in the sanctuary Wednesday for Christmas Eve at 7:00 where we’ll join our sisters and brothers from Chico First Baptist Church to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.