

Christmas Eve Sermon –Dec. 24, 2024

Luke 2:1-20

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I've been thinking a lot about vulnerability over the last few days. Buildings are vulnerable. This church sanctuary, perched up on top of a hill makes it vulnerable to storms. It is a building without a sprinkler system and is situated on a property without fire hydrants. It is vulnerable. While I worry about buildings, I'm far more concerned about people. Because people are vulnerable too.

Like property they are vulnerable to the forces of wind, water, fire, and weather. We've seen that in multiple instances over the last year. But people are also vulnerable to economic forces. They are vulnerable to political forces. They are vulnerable to the decisions made by others who may or may not have their best interests at heart. People with power often make decisions that will almost certainly have an impact on the vulnerable.

I'm dare say that many of the decisions that people make are a result of their fear of being vulnerable. The tough exterior, the attacking words or actions: these behaviors are seen frequently in people who are afraid of being exposed as vulnerable; afraid of being shamed. Recognizing their deep-seated fear of exposure helps us to understand and feel compassion for them. Vulnerability is a force in the world to be reckoned with.

Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus are three vulnerable people.

Mary is the epitome of vulnerability. She is young. She is unmarried. She is pregnant outside of marriage. And now she is nine months pregnant and walking to Bethlehem because the government is conducting a census. The government's decision had wide ranging impacts on people and we can be reasonably certain the decision makers didn't worry too much about a pregnant woman from Galilee and whether it was safe for her to walk to Bethlehem.

The edict is that all should go to their home village to be registered. For those of you who have been pregnant, you know how your ob/gyn cautions you about traveling long distances in the last trimester. Mary and Joseph likely walked 85 miles from

Nazareth to Bethlehem. As she completes her pregnancy Mary is vulnerable.

Joseph is also vulnerable. He is not yet formally married to Mary and his reputation is at stake just associating with her. It is actually quite unusual that Mary should travel with him to Bethlehem. Joseph is the one who is supposed to register; not Mary. So why is she even accompanying him? There's a bit of a mystery here that cannot be explained but the story hints of vulnerability. It seems that the two of them are safer together than apart. Now Joseph isn't just vulnerable because he's traveling with Mary: traveling in itself makes a person vulnerable. People in those days usually traveled in groups because of the danger. The Roman empire might be ruling the country but bandits and insurgents are roaming the land attempting to undermine the army's dominance. It is dangerous on the roads. Travelers are vulnerable.

Which brings me to the newborn child: any and every new born is vulnerable by virtue of being newly born. The startling thing about Jesus is that God makes God's self vulnerable. God could have just played it safe. God could have set up the circumstances of Jesus' birth such that he was born in a house belonging to a respectable family with extra space or in a palace, or just about anywhere else for that matter.

God makes a surprising choice having Jesus born in a stable. Why did God make that choice? Because if God's son had been born in any of those more comfortable settings, it would have hindered the connection that God wanted to re-establish with all of the marginalized people of the world. As you think about all of the stories of Jesus' life you will remember that many of them describe Jesus out on the margins helping the vulnerable people that surrounded him. He healed lepers and the demon-possessed: vulnerable by virtue of their illnesses. He fed thousands of hungry people: vulnerable due to lack of food. He restored sight to the blind and "unstopped the ears" of the deaf: vulnerable because of sensory deprivation. He utilized disciples who came from the lower classes of society; men and women who were generally vulnerable because they had little political or economic clout. Jesus came for the vulnerable and his work was among the vulnerable.

We humans need a God just like that. A God who cares about the vulnerable and works with and for them. We humans need a God who is willing to look weak and vulnerable through association with people who are weak and vulnerable. We need a God who isn't afraid of the assumptions onlookers make; who isn't afraid of what

people with power might think. That's exactly what we have in Jesus, God's Son the one who demonstrates his willingness to look weak and vulnerable from the moment of his birth.

While this afternoon is a time to celebrate the birth of God's son, we must remember the end of his story. Jesus lived in such a state of vulnerability that he was arrested, crucified, and died on a cross: one of the most humiliating deaths imaginable. Yet we must also remember that while God's Son looked vulnerable there was a hidden power underlying his supposed weakness. That hidden power was God's power to resurrect—a promise of life after death. That resurrection promise was available to him and is available for all of us.

On this afternoon we gather to worship a God who gives up all power to be born as a vulnerable baby. We gather to worship a God who loves us, just as we are; the vulnerable of the world. And for that we can exclaim: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those that God favors. We, the vulnerable ones, are the ones that God favors. Amen.