

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

21st December 2025 – Fourth Sunday in Advent

Matthew 1:18-25

CALLED

‘What would I do if I found myself in that situation?’ Have you ever asked yourself that question? I’m guessing that most people would answer, ‘yes!’ to that, and so my follow up question is: when have you asked that question of yourself? Perhaps when you see a family member or friend going through some kind of hardship; sickness, relationship breakdown, financial struggles, etc, you ask yourself, ‘mmm, how would I respond if I was going through what they are right now?’ Sometimes we may ask ourselves this question when we hear of people in situations of religious persecution, where they are called to choose between hiding or denying their faith, or speaking out and risking imprisonment or death. Have you ever wondered what you would do if placed in that situation? In the wake of the horrific events of last Sunday night in Bondi we’ve now heard of many examples which cause us to ask this question. Not only were there the outwardly brave incidents of people placing themselves in danger to save the lives of others, for which they are receiving the thanks and accolades they deserve, but now we also hear of staff guiding people into restaurants so they could shelter in safety, first aid being administered to the injured while the situation was still dangerous, people lying on top of their children, and even children they didn’t know, to save them, and local people opening up their homes in the immediate aftermath of this event to give comfort to those affected. We pray that we will never find ourselves in a situation like that, but if we did, do you wonder how you would respond? In the battle of instincts to preserve yourself, or to help others, both very natural and right, which would win out?

‘What would I do if I found myself in that situation?’ That’s also a question we can ask as we think about the person who plays a part in our Gospel reading today, Joseph. Joseph is the person who doesn’t get the big credits, the accolades, and so he is sometimes called the ‘forgotten hero’ or the ‘invisible man’ of the Christmas story. Joseph, who is so important and central to God’s plan to

come into the world in Jesus, doesn't even say one word in all the mentions we have of him in the Bible. But, without Joseph, things would be different. As a descendant of King David, Joseph gives Jesus His legal status as coming from David's family, and so Joseph helps to fulfill prophecies. And as the one who was engaged to marry Mary, if , when he found out Mary was pregnant, Joseph had said, 'No way, that is not my baby. The engagement is off!', then Mary the mother of God's Son, would have at best faced both shame and being cast out for her and her family, and at worst she could have been killed for adultery. God's plan of salvation for all people relied on Joseph obediently doing what God called Him to do.

God chose Joseph. God called Joseph. God used Joseph as a part of His plan to bring all people back to Him. Every story has its supporting cast, and so too the story of God and His people. All that we know about Joseph is what we are told in the few instances he is spoken of in the life of Jesus; here at Jesus' birth, when Jesus is two years old and His parents flee to Egypt to save Him from King Herod's vengeance, and when Jesus is twelve and left behind in the Temple in Jerusalem. That's it! But we are told here that Joseph was a good man, and from those other instances we know he loved and cared for Jesus as his own son. Joseph put aside what could have been personal hurt and betrayal, he took on the disapproval he would have received from others, and in response to God's call he faithfully carried out His part in God's work and plan.

And when we look at the Bible, the story of God and His people, we see this call of God to His people in their everyday lives, and their obedient response to Him, again and again. There are the people who play pretty central roles, and who we know a lot about, like Moses, Abraham, Ruth, Paul, King David, Esther, Peter and the other disciples. Then there are others, like Joseph, who are only briefly in this story, but without them it would be very different; Tamar, Nicodemus, Rahab, Miriam, Caleb. In many ways they are all very different people, but what brings them together is that they are called by God, where they are, as they are, to serve Him and His people. They are called and, even though they don't always do it perfectly, they respond to God's call to them.

‘What would I do if I found myself in that situation?’ Whether that’s a call like the one given to Joseph, or like any of those other people from the Bible, what would it be like to have God call us to serve Him, to be a part of His work, in our lives? Can we imagine how we would respond if we found ourselves in that situation? Well, we don’t really have to imagine that in our lives, do we, because as God’s people we experience God’s call to us, in our everyday lives, just like Joseph and all those other people we read about in the Bible. Our call might not be to be the mother or father of God’s own Son, or to lead an army or bring a whole nation to follow God. In our modern context our call might not be to stand up against persecution, thank God, or, for most of us, completely leave our current lives so we can follow God and share His love. What are we called to do then? To love God and love others. To forgive as we are forgiven. To use what God has given us to provide both what we need and enjoy, and also to aid God’s work, help those who go without; to share with others. Following last Sunday’s tragedy, we are called to consider what we can do, each one of us, in what we think, what we say, how we act, to make this a nation in which all people are accepted and supported. In our everyday lives we are called to see our work, and every role we have, as our vocations; as the situations God has put us in and gifted us to do so we can serve Him and His people. We are called to show God’s love to all people, those we love and who love us, but also even those we may disagree with. Just like Joseph, just like all those other people, God calls us to share His love and His grace with everyone, just like you are encouraged to pray every day with our Living Grace cards at the moment. Take the time to stop, think, reflect, not just today but regularly; how is God calling me to serve Him in my life right now? Because you can bet that He is.

And how do we respond to God’s call? Maybe one way to think about it is like this: ‘Keep calm and be a Joseph’. Even though we know little about Joseph, we do know that he was a ‘good man’, was humble, loving, and obedient to God and faithful to his family. All qualities which were important in his relatively small but so important part in God’s plan. You might feel self-conscious about sharing this with others, but what are the qualities, the gifts, talents, God has given you, which you can use to serve Him? Think about them, because often when you can see how God has gifted

you, you can then also see where He is calling you. Are you gifted in talking to people, providing hospitality, helping out, with music, teaching, planning and organisation, caring for those in need, fixing things, making sure things get done, speaking out, showing your love for God and others just by being who you are? God has gifted each one of you, God is calling each one of you. Be open to discovering what those gifts are.

‘What would I do if I found myself in that situation?’ Instead of asking ourselves that question, when it comes to God’s call to us in our lives we can ask, ‘how has God gifted me, how is God calling me, to share His love and grace with others in my life each day?’ Although we’re not told a lot about Joseph, we can be sure that he wasn’t always perfect in carrying out his call, because no one ever has been. But still, God worked in and through Him, just like He does with us. As we receive God’s grace and love, we are called to share God’s grace and love. That’s both the message of Christmas, and what God calls us to do as we live our lives in and for Him each day. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- ‘What would I do if I found myself in that situation?’ When are some times you have asked yourself this question? Is it always possible to know how we would act and respond in a particular situation?
- What do you know about Joseph? Why do you think God selected him for the ‘quiet’ but important role of being the human father of God’s Son?
- How is God calling you to be a part of His plan to bring all people to know Him? Is it always easy to know this call? Are there things you are being called to do which you are finding it difficult to accept?
- Our call from God is often linked to how He has gifted us. What are your gifts: spiritual, physical, emotional? How has God equipped you to carry out what He is calling you to do?

Pray: Thank God for all the blessings and gifts He has given you in your life. Thank Him for those people who faithfully carry out His call in their lives. Ask God to help us to both know His call and in faith to step out and serve Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
21.12.2025*