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“Til the Soul Felt It’s Worth” by Rev. Jessica Vaughan Lower, Associate Pastor

The story of Christmas is a familiar one to many: a silent night, the cattle lowing, a mother and child (no crying he makes), a new family huddled against the cold under a canopy of clear, bright stars, accompanied by curious shepherds and their sheep.

But there is another version of this story that is not so clean and sanitized; and if it’s a familiar story, it is not a comforting one. In the other story, Mary is an unwed teen mother—worse!, a woman pregnant and engaged to a man who is not the father of her child. In another version of the story, Joseph is looking to be divorced even before he has a wife to divorce from. And then we have the unborn child: a mystery to his mother Mary, a source of doubt for his father Joseph, an unanticipated birth, insignificant and mundane to the rest of the world.

Because the truth is that nearly no one in first century Palestine was much paying attention to Joseph, Mary, and the scandal surrounding them at all. And yet, it is through this story of a fool, a scandalous woman, and an illegitimate child that God chose to exemplify God’s love to this world and God’s love for us.

It says something that God is so completely unconcerned with circumstances and reputation that God chose to reveal Godself to the world not with earthquakes and thunder while riding flaming stallions in the sky, but through the tiny screams of a newborn baby, vulnerable against the cold, constrained tightly in a swaddle and laid in a feeding trough by a teenage girl and her not-yet-husband.

And it says something that the arrival of God into the lives of Mary and Joseph and into the world was so deeply disruptive and disorientating to them as the people who were the most faithful. The arrival of God into the lives of Mary and Joseph caused confusion, pitting one woman’s word against the assumptions of the world, and drove the powerful King Herod mad to the point that he instigated a genocide against toddlers.

All this mess caused by the arrival of God’s presence on earth.

Which is really the point. When God shows up, things get messy. When God shows up, the status quo is interrupted. When God shows up, what appears to be unredeemable is redeemed.

Were it not about God’s love in the story of the birth of Christ, then Christmas really is just a story of a fool, a scandalous woman, and an illegitimate child. It is God’s love that transforms this story from a story of embarrassment and tragedy into a story of hope. It is God’s lack of concern for comfort and image and appearances that transforms this story from a story of crippling disruption into a story of true freedom, new life, and life to the full.

It turns out that God’s love transforms every circumstance, and it transforms every circumstance thoroughly and completely.

And that is the Good News of Christmas. Because if God’s love can transform this insignificant and yet scandalous story of a child born in a barn into one of the most retold, one of the most celebrated, one of the most shocking stories of the last two thousand years, then that means that God’s love can transform our life’s stories too. That means that God’s love can transform our most regretted of decisions, our most shameful actions, our most cowardly reactions into something meaningful. That means that God’s love can change our most devastating life’s circumstances, our most disorientating life’s disruptions into something purposeful. That means that God’s love will change the people that exist almost in secret, in quiet, who don’t appear to be of any significance to anyone. If God’s love can transform everything about this story, then that means that God can transform everything about us next.

God’s Love disrupted all that was acceptable in the world—God’s Love bucked the unquestioned and accepted status quo—so that God’s love could come to earth for you and for me, for all those whom we love, and for all those whom nobody loves.