

## Monday Quotes



### Grain

“Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument.”

–Reinhold Niebuhr

### Field

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:18-21

### Thoughts by Reverend Peder Johanson, Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Broadhead, WI

In early 2017, I received a phone call from a concerned teacher in our community. The constant fear of deportation was traumatizing her Mexican students and their families. Some could barely get through the day without anxiety attacks. They can't live like this, let alone learn like this. What could the church do to help? That question eventually led us to a partnership with the Mexican Consulate from Milwaukee. They travel on certain Saturdays to set up a "Mobile Consulate," providing services and local access for their citizens across the state. We have now hosted them twice and are on their schedule again for 2020.

That phone call was an unexpected surprise. The teacher wasn't a member. It was prompted by a terrible and painful reality and led to some hard conversations. *And it was a tremendous gift that has given us new life and hope as the body of Christ.* It has moved us from thinking of hospitality as "coffee hour" to radical welcome and support for strangers. The Spirit is teaching us new things, like how to show up in new ways and to give with greater generosity. We continue to be surprised and blessed by the unexpected opportunities the Spirit puts before us. We have not only signed on to be a Welcoming Congregation with AMMPARO, but are now on a journey to becoming a Reconciling In Christ (RIC) Congregation as well. Though I might have hoped and dreamed for us to grow in our work for justice, I didn't expect this: God's justice *coming to us* in the form of a tearful phone call.

Unlike Luke's narrative, Matthew's telling of the Christmas story offers no divine explanation of Mary's pregnancy until *after* she is "found to be with child." Think about that. This greatest gift showed up unexpectedly, *with no words of assurance*, surrounded by fear and panic. Can we even imagine what a shock this pregnancy must have been for Mary and for Joseph? Matthew's story reminds us that sometimes God comes to be with us where we are, unexplained and unexpected. Jesus will go on to teach the importance of doing justice out in the world, but we hear up front that sometimes God's justice shows up right where we are. Sometimes, the grace that "will save us from our sins" arrives unannounced, and – if we aren't ready to receive it – unnoticed. But we know what God can do, my friends. We've seen it before. And, in hope, we know we'll see it again. Happy Monday!

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Many Blessings upon you,

Pastor Peder Johanson