

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

Scripture

Joshua 1:9
Matthew 1:18-25

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is the first sermon in the series.

Core theological idea: Sometimes, to follow Christ, we must holler, “Darn the torpedoes, full steam ahead!!”

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to take risks to fully follow Jesus.

The Sermon

One of my favorite Civil War stories occurred on 5 August 1864, during the naval battle of Mobile Bay, Alabama. The Union Commander, Admiral David Farragut, was positioned high on his ship’s rigging observing the battle. When he observed his fleet slowing down, he asked why his ships were not plowing ahead at full speed. The reply came back that naval mines (then called “torpedoes”) were in their path—to which he bellowed out, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead.”¹

Admiral Farragut’s fleet of 18 ships plowed through the torpedoes (naval mines), positioned themselves beyond the range of shore-based guns and defeated the confederate naval forces. With no naval support, the 3 Confederate Forts defending Mobile Bay were forced to surrender. Admiral Farragut took a risk by plowing through the mines but, by taking that risk, he took Mobile Bay and hastened the end of the Civil War.

This story applies to us as followers of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, to truly follow Jesus, we must cry out, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!” Following Jesus can be risky and it often involves running into torpedoes. There are two reasons for this.

The first reason is that Jesus calls us to always love all people. In every situation, we are to take the right and loving course of action. This means loving our enemies. As you already know, the world can be extremely cruel and highly

¹ He may have actually said, “Damn the torpedoes. Four bells, Captain Drayton.” Then he may have shouted to the commander of *Metacomet*, lashed to *Hartford*’s side, “Go ahead, [Jouett](#), full speed.” The words have been altered in time to the more familiar, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mobile_Bay

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

unfair. There are people in this world who will take advantage of our kindness and empathy. Many people will respond to our love with hate. Just look at Jesus. He loved all people and found himself tortured and murdered on a cross. I'd say he faced a rather big torpedo. We too can expect torpedoes to come our way when we love unconditionally.

The second reason is that God calls us to proclaim the Kingdom of God as a present reality. The Kingdom of God is life as God intends – life as God intends in heaven, within our hearts, and here on earth. God does not intend for there to be poverty, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to alleviate poverty. God does not intend for there to be racism, homophobia, or transphobia, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to eradicate racism, homophobia, or transphobia. God does not intend for there to be hatred, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to love everyone. God does not intend for there to be oppression, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to promote justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Lastly, God does not intend for there to be violence, so we, as followers of Jesus, become peacemakers.

This is where faith comes in. We seek to love unconditionally, knowing that we will slam into some torpedoes. We proclaim the Kingdom of God, expecting a few torpedoes to blow up in our faces. But we also expect God to help us, protect us and take care of us when torpedoes blow a gaping hole in our sides. So, when we have opportunities to love the unlovable or proclaim the Kingdom of God, we can say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!”

To accomplish God's loving will, Joseph had to say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!”

When he first learned of Mary's pregnancy, he was understandably upset. I suspect that Mary told him that he was pregnant by way of the Holy Spirit, but he did not believe her. I know that If I had been Joseph, I would not have believed her. So, he decided to call off the engagement and do so quietly to keep Mary from public disgrace. By doing it quietly, he would also avoid some potential torpedoes. He wouldn't have to deal with the embarrassment of having an unfaithful fiancé or dealing with the 'baby's daddy' or raising a bastard child. The easiest solution with the fewest potential torpedoes was a quiet divorce.

But then an angel visited Joseph in a dream to straighten him out. Yes, sometimes God needs to send a messenger to straighten us out. If your parents ever had to tell you something you did not want to hear but needed to hear, that may have been God sending someone to straighten you out. If a friend ever had to tell you something you didn't want to hear but needed to hear, that may have been God sending someone to straighten you out. Well, Joseph needed to be

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

straightened out, so God sent an angel. The Angel proclaimed, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

From that point on, Joseph decided to follow God and say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!” He didn’t know what would come his way. Would people ostracize Mary for being a loose woman and ostracize him for putting up with such a woman? Would his carpentry business suffer? How would he raise God’s Son? How would he discipline him? What if he screwed up? What would God say? Yes, lots of potential torpedoes.

As it turned out, Joseph had to navigate through numerous torpedoes.

First, according to Luke’s account, Joseph had to travel on foot with a pregnant woman from Nazareth to Bethlehem to participate in a mandatory census. (Mary may or may not have had a donkey to ride on. Scripture doesn’t say.) It was a treacherous distance of approximately 90 miles, and it would have taken them over a week to complete it.

When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, Mary was about to give birth. Joseph now had to deal with a lady about to go into labor in a town bursting at its seams with nowhere for them to stay. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, the only thing they had for a crib was a dirty manger – a feeding trough. They were probably in a cave or on the first floor of a house where the animals were kept. So, Joseph had to find decent housing for his family.

On the night Jesus was born, a bunch of dirty shepherds showed up, unexpectedly, just to see the baby. So, Mary, who had just given birth, and Joseph, who was burdened with worry, had to entertain a bunch of rowdy strangers. I imagine Mary and Joseph just wanted to be left alone with their baby for the night.

These were some big torpedoes, but an even bigger one was just around the corner. Soon after settling into a house, an angel told Joseph in a dream to immediately leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt because King Herod was about to murder every child in Bethlehem who was 2 years old or younger. That, of course, would have included Jesus. So, Joseph, Mary and little Jesus fled to Egypt as political refugees.

When King Herod died, an angel told Joseph it was safe for them to return to the land of Israel. At first, they were going to settle in Bethlehem, but they found out

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

that King Herod’s son, Archelaus, was reigning in Judah. So, they moved further north into Galilee and settled in their hometown of Nazareth.

These were some powerful torpedoes that threatened Joseph and his family, but God always took care of them. Angels warned Joseph and told him what he should do. The Wise Men offered frankincense, myrrh and gold when they visited them in Bethlehem. These were extremely valuable items that Joseph may have sold to obtain quick money when they fled to Egypt. God provides what we need when we need it to do His loving will.

Joseph plowed through the torpedoes and some of them did explode but God was always there to take care of him and his family. The same is true for us. When we seek to love all people and proclaim the Kingdom of God we’ll run into torpedoes, and some will explode. But God will take care of us and bring us through to victory.

About 15 years ago, God protected me from a potential torpedo when I attempted to demonstrate unconditional love. I was counseling a nice lady who explained that her son was in the Duval County jail. I told her I would visit him.

When I arrived at the jail, the Corrections Officer informed me that I would have a non-contact visit with him. That meant there would be thick plexiglass between the two of us. We could see and talk with each other but there would be no physical contact. Up to that point, I was able to visit inmates with nothing separating us. So, I was annoyed about this new non-contact visitation policy.

When I walked into the room and looked through the plexiglass window, I saw a rather tall, muscular and mean looking man with a permanent scowl on his face. His muscles were tense, and his fists were clenched. He was ready to strike.

He did most of the talking, which was normal. Whenever I visit people in jail, I try to do more listening than talking. When I do talk, I usually ask open ended questions, suggest an appropriate Bible passage or offer to pray. This time, however, I made a comment, and he didn’t like what I said. I think the comment was about taking responsibility for our own actions. I literally saw his face become bright red while his eyes narrowed into a penetrating stare. He rose up on his feet and, with a voice that sliced my heart with fear, proceeded to tell me how horrible his mother was and how horrible I was for talking with his mom. His rage was boiling over like an erupting volcano.

I calmly sat there, listening to him rage on. After a few minutes of watching the Hulk come out, I lightly touched the plexiglass window and gave thanks to God

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

for that plexiglass. Being beaten or scared off by an inmate would have been a powerful torpedo, but God saved me from that torpedo.

God calls us to many ministries that expose us to all sorts of torpedoes. God may call us to protest cruel immigration policies that dehumanizes our brothers and sisters. That could cause a lot of turmoil – a lot of torpedoes.

God may also call us to help the poor and risk the possibility of people taking advantage of our generosity. We have a helping hands fund. Half the proceeds we raised from the Pumpkin Patch went into this fund. I use this fund to help people with emergency financial needs. Although I have rules to safeguard against this, there will be people who try to take advantage of this ministry. They'll come to me with made up stories to get as much money from us as possible. As with any good ministry, there are potential torpedoes.

This Advent and Christmas, let's remember the birth story of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Let's remember how Joseph was able to say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!” and follow his example so that we too can serve The Lord.

Let's pray.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

Sermon Outline

- I. One of my favorite Civil War stories occurred on August 5, 1864 during the naval battle of Mobile Bay, Alabama.
 - A. The Union Commander, Admiral David Farragut, was positioned high on his ship’s rigging observing the battle.
 - When he observed his fleet slowing down, he asked why his ships were not plowing ahead at full speed.
 - The reply came back that naval mines (then called "torpedoes") were in their path—to which he bellowed out, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."²
 - B. Admiral Farragut’s fleet of 18 ships plowed through the torpedoes (naval mines), positioned themselves beyond the range of shore-based guns and defeated the confederate naval forces.
 - With no naval support, the 3 Confederate Forts defending Mobile Bay were forced to surrender.
 - Admiral Farragut took a risk by plowing through the mines but, by taking that risk, he took Mobile Bay and hastened the end of the Civil War.
 - C. This story applies to us as followers of Jesus Christ.
 - Sometimes, to truly follow Jesus, we must cry out, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!”
 - Following Jesus can be risky and it often involves running into torpedoes.
 - There are two reasons for this.
- II. The two reasons why following Jesus involves the risk of running into torpedoes

² He may have actually said, “Damn the torpedoes. Four bells, Captain Drayton.” Then he may have shouted to the commander of *Metacomet*, lashed to *Hartford*’s side, “Go ahead, [Jouett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mobile_Bay), full speed.” The words have been altered in time to the more familiar, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” - (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mobile_Bay)

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

A. The first reason is that Jesus calls us to always love all people.

- In every situation, we are to take the right and loving course of action.
- This means loving our enemies.
- As you already know, the world can be extremely cruel and highly unfair.
 - There are people in this world who will take advantage of our kindness and empathy.
 - Many people will respond to our love with hate.
- Just look at Jesus.
 - He loved all people and found himself tortured and murdered on a cross.
 - I'd say he faced a rather big torpedo.
 - We too can expect torpedoes to come our way when we love unconditionally.

B. The second reason is that God calls us to proclaim the Kingdom of God as a present reality.

- The Kingdom of God is life as God intends – life as God intends in heaven, within our hearts, and here on earth.
 - God does not intend for there to be poverty, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to alleviate poverty.
 - God does not intend for there to be racism, homophobia, or transphobia, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to eradicate racism, homophobia, or transphobia.
 - God does not intend for there to be hatred, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to love everyone.
 - God does not intend for there to be oppression, so we, as followers of Jesus, do what we can to promote justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- Lastly, God does not intend for there to be violence, so we, as followers of Jesus, become peacemakers.
- This is where faith comes in.
 - We seek to love unconditionally, knowing that we will slam into some torpedoes.
 - We proclaim the Kingdom of God, expecting a few torpedoes to blow up in our faces.
 - But we also expect God to help us, protect us and take care of us when torpedoes blow a gaping hole in our sides.
 - So, when we have opportunities to love the unlovable or proclaim the Kingdom of God, we can say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!”

III. To accomplish God’s loving will, Joseph had to say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!”

A. When he first learned of Mary’s pregnancy, he was understandably upset.

- I suspect that Mary told him that he was pregnant by way of the Holy Spirit, but he did not believe her.
 - I know that If I had been Joseph, I would not have believed her.
- So, he decided to call off the engagement and do so quietly to keep Mary from public disgrace.
- By doing it quietly, he would also avoid some potential torpedoes.
 - He wouldn’t have to deal with the embarrassment of having an unfaithful fiancé or dealing with the ‘baby’s daddy’ or raising a bastard child.
 - The easiest solution with the fewest potential torpedoes was a quiet divorce.

B. But then an angel visited Joseph in a dream to straighten him out.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- Yes, sometimes God needs to send a messenger to straighten us out.
 - If your parents ever had to say something you didn’t want to hear but needed to hear, that may have been God sending them to straighten you out.
 - If a friend ever had to say something to you that you didn’t want to hear but needed to hear, that may have been God sending somebody to straighten you out.
 - Well, Joseph needed straightening out, so God sent an angel.
 - The Angel proclaimed, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
- C. From that point on, Joseph decided to follow God and say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!” He didn’t know what would come his way.
- Would people ostracize Mary for being a loose woman and ostracize him for putting up with such a woman?
 - Would his carpentry business suffer?
 - How would he raise God’s Son?
 - How would he discipline him?
 - What if he screwed up? What would God say?
 - Yes, lots of potential torpedoes.
- D. As it turned out, Joseph had to navigate through numerous torpedoes.
- First, according to Luke’s account, Joseph had to travel on foot with a pregnant woman from Nazareth to Bethlehem to participate in a mandatory census.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- Mary may or may not have had a donkey to ride on.
Scripture doesn't say.
 - It was a treacherous distance of approximately 90 miles, and it would have taken them over a week to complete it.
 - When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, Mary was about to give birth.
 - Joseph now had to deal with a lady about to go into labor in a town bursting at its seams with nowhere for them to stay.
 - When Mary gave birth to Jesus, the only thing they had for a crib was a dirty manger.
 - They were probably in a cave or on the first floor of a house where the animals were kept.
 - So, Joseph had to find decent housing for his family.
 - On the night Jesus was born, a bunch of dirty shepherds showed up, unexpectedly, just to see the baby.
 - So, Mary, who had just given birth, and Joseph, who was burdened with worry, had to entertain a bunch of rowdy strangers.
 - I imagine Mary and Joseph just wanted to be left alone with their baby for the night.
- E. These were some big torpedoes, but an even bigger one was just around the corner.
- Soon after settling into a house, an angel told Joseph in a dream to immediately leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt because King Herod was about to murder every child in Bethlehem who was 2 years old or younger.
 - That, of course, would have included Jesus.
 - So, Joseph, Mary and little Jesus fled to Egypt as political refugees.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- When King Herod died, an angel told Joseph it was safe for them to return to the land of Israel.
 - At first, they were going to settle in Bethlehem but they found out that King Herod’s son, Archelaus, was reigning in Judah.
 - So, they moved further north into Galilee and settled in their hometown of Nazareth.

F. These were some powerful torpedoes that threatened Joseph and his family, but God always took care of him.

- Angels warned him and told him what he should do.
- The Wise Men offered frankincense, myrrh and gold when they visited them in Bethlehem.
 - These were extremely valuable items that Joseph may have sold to obtain quick money when they fled to Egypt.
 - God provides what we need when we need it to do His loving will.
- Joseph plowed through the torpedoes and some of them did explode but God was always there to take care of him and his family.

G. The same is true for us.

- When we seek to love all people and proclaim the Kingdom of God we’ll run into torpedoes, and some will explode.
- But God will take care of us and bring us through to victory.

IV. About 15 years ago, God protected me from a potential torpedo when I attempted to demonstrate unconditional love.

A. I was counseling a nice lady who explained that her son was in the Duval County jail.

- I told her I would visit him.

B. When I arrived at the jail, the Corrections Officer informed me that I would have a non-contact visit with him.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- That meant there would be thick plexiglass between the two of us.
 - We could see and talk with each other but there would be no physical contact.
 - Up to that point, I was able to visit inmates with nothing separating us.
 - So, I was annoyed about this new non-contact visitation policy.
- C. When I walked into the room and looked through the plexiglass window, I saw a rather tall, muscular and mean looking man with a permanent scowl on his face.
- His muscles were tense, and his fists were clenched. He was ready to strike.
- D. He did most of the talking, which was normal.
- Whenever I visit people in jail, I try to do more listening than talking.
 - When I do talk, I usually ask open ended questions, suggest an appropriate Bible passage or offer to pray.
 - This time, however, I made a comment, and he didn't like what I said.
 - I think the comment was about taking responsibility for our own actions.
 - I literally saw his face become bright red while his eyes narrowed into a penetrating stare.
 - He rose up on his feet and, with a voice that sliced my heart with fear, proceeded to tell me how horrible his mother was and how horrible I was for talking with his mom.
 - His rage was boiling over like an erupting volcano.
- E. I calmly sat there, listening to him rage on.
- After a few minutes of watching the Hulk come out, I lightly touched the plexiglass window and gave thanks to God for that plexiglass.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Joseph: Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!”
(Part I of the Advent series “The Faces of Christmas”)
November 30, 2025

- Being beaten or scared off by an inmate would have been a powerful torpedo, but God saved me from that torpedo.
- V. God calls us to many ministries that expose us to all sorts of torpedoes.
- A. God may call us to protest cruel immigration policies that dehumanizes our brothers and sisters.
- That could cause a lot of turmoil – a lot of torpedoes.
- B. God may also call us to help the poor and risk the possibility of people taking advantage of our generosity.
- We have a helping hands fund.
 - Half the proceeds we raised from the Pumpkin Patch went into this fund.
 - I use this fund to help people with emergency financial needs.
 - Although I have rules to safeguard against this, there will be people who try to take advantage of this ministry.
 - They’ll come to me with made up stories to get as much money from us as possible.
 - As with any good ministry, there are potential torpedoes.
- VI. This Advent and Christmas, let’s remember the birth story of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.
- A. Let’s remember how Joseph was able to say, “Darn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!!” and follow his example so that we too can serve The Lord.

Let’s pray.