



“In Weakness and Humility, God Reigns”

Text: Luke 1:26-38, 46-55

a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler

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Have you ever thought about what God placed in the tiny human hands of Jesus? Picture the soft, weak, uncontrolled hands of a newborn baby - arms and hands that flail around, no control. Yet, it was into these hands that the divine answer to all the torments that humans have ever experienced - the brutality of war, addiction, gun violence, domestic violence, and death was placed. All our healing and hopes contained in the hands of a tiny, newborn child. Yet, that child would have never been born if Mary hadn't first said yes.

I'd like for us to think about Mary's sacrifice. As I mentioned last week, Mary had to endure several days of travel on the hard back of a donkey just to get to Bethlehem and, then, after getting there, she had to give birth in a stable, among animals, with none of the women she knew and loved to comfort and guide her through the process. I can't imagine giving birth with just my husband beside me. But even before those sacrifices, Mary was asked to do even more. Mary had to say yes to having this God child. She had to say yes to what could be a shameful experience for her. Shamed at being pregnant before the consummation of the marriage. Shame of possibly being rejected by Joseph. Shame for bringing shame to her family. On a human level, these are all things that may have flitted through her mind when the angel told her of this blessing of a child.

We are told that she was troubled by the angels words and the angel told her to not be afraid. It can be very scary to be asked by God to do something big and out of the ordinary. Before she says yes, we have Mary questioning the angel. She does not immediately take his word at face value. How can this be? she asks.

And then, there was the child himself. What would she have to do as mother of this Son of God? After all the diaper changes, the nursing and weaning, teaching him to talk and walk, would she be the one who would have to explain to him who his father really was or what was being asked of him to do? Did these thoughts and questions race through her head as she heard the words of the angel? They may have and yet Mary still said yes. And, if you've never thought of it before, please know that Mary had a choice to say yes or no. We always have a choice to say yes or no to what God asks of us.

What led her to say yes? What we know of Mary, as told to us through the scriptures, is that she was a woman of faith and that she was taught the scriptures. She held them in her heart. She knew them inside and out. We see that in her words in the Magnificat. And, perhaps it is also that the angel mentioned that Elizabeth was pregnant. Her elderly cousin who had always been barren was now pregnant. And, perhaps hearing that news prompted her to remember the blessings of children to Sarah and Hannah. While Mary was not barren, each of these women had been blessed by God with sons who had served God faithfully. Maybe in remembering God's faithfulness to these women, and her own trust in the God she had learned about and worshipped, had given her the courage to say yes.

We think of Mary as this perfect person. We are told that she found favor in God's eyes. She was a virgin, pure, but that doesn't mean she was perfect, without sin. She was a teenager, a young woman, raised in the scriptures but also in the norms of the day for that society. She was a sinful human, like us, and capable of the whims of human nature like us. Yet it was to this young woman that God placed God's trust in to raise the Son of God; and it was into this tiny little body, this newborn infant that needed to be fed and changed and have every need met like every other baby born before and since, that God put the fate and the future of humankind upon. Could those tiny hands lift up the downtrodden, heal the sick, comfort the grieving? Could that

tiny back carry the weight of the world? Could that tiny body really break the bonds of sin and death?

As is the message of the gospel God does amazing things, miraculous things through the weak, the disenfranchised, the least of these ... and isn't that something to wonder about? The strong, the rich, the powerful don't really have control, because over and over again God has proved God's saving power, grace, and love comes in and through the lowly, the common person, through the every man, woman, and child, through people just like you and me.

There are 2 points I'd like you to remember:

1. God loved us so much that he wanted to show us that love through the words and actions of Jesus, but God wanted to show us that God understood all that we went through from the time of birth and also that God's biggest miracles sometimes start in the smallest of ways.

2. None of this could have come about if Mary hadn't said yes. In her still young ways, she found the strength and the faith to say yes to God. She wasn't rich. She had no power or influence through family connections. She was a lowly young woman engaged to a carpenter. Yet it is through this relatively insignificant young woman that God's will could be carried out.

We may think that we are insignificant, that we have no power. What we do in our daily lives has little impact on the overall wellbeing of others or little to do in God's grand scheme of salvation for all. Yet, our saying yes to whatever God calls us to is saying yes to the larger plan God has for us and the future of creating a new earth. We all play a part in the creation story when we say yes to God, but we need to be open to the big yes's as Mary was and not just the small yes's. That's to say that we need to be open to hearing God's voice - and if it is something unexpected, then we can question that voice as Mary did, but then if called, we need to step out in faith and say yes. We need to be in prayer and be open to both the small yes's that are asked of us on a daily basis and to the big yes's that might be asked of us. Regardless, God uses us in all our frailty when we say yes and when that happens then hope is given and love is shared, peace is found and faith is strengthened.

Today let us remember Jesus, not as the man on the cross, not as the man who traversed throughout the hills and valleys preaching, but let us remember the tiny newborn baby upon whose back God placed the sins of the world. An innocent child who Mary swaddled and kissed on the top of his head, on his little nose, on his chubby cheeks. Let us remember the girl who became the mother of Christ because she said yes in faith. And let us remember that you and I are not insignificant nor are our actions and words. We need to say yes to God in both the big and little asks. That's what we are called to do in our frailty, in our selfish human nature, in our smallness, in our faithfulness to the One who Saved us. Like Mary, we aren't perfect, but like Mary we can also say yes and fulfill the will of our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

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