

Sermons at St. Luke's

A sermon preached by The Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr. on Sunday, December 18, 2011.

(II Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38)

“Here am I,” says Mary to the angel. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.” The evangelists John and Paul heard this passage and wrote these words in response, “When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, speaking of words of wisdom, let it be.” That’s John Lennon and Paul McCartney, in case you were wondering. And that old Beatles song “Let it Be” does conjure up this image of Mother Mary coming to us in times of trouble with reassuring words, “Let it be.” Almost as if she’s saying, “Don’t be afraid. It’s going to be all right. With God, nothing will be impossible.” And we love that image of Mary as a reassuring, meek and mild mother of God. But is that the Gospel?

The Gospel we hear on this fourth Sunday of Advent is more than just mere reassurance. Now, certainly we need reassurance. We need comforting. But the good news goes deeper than that. Mary speaks these words, “Let it be with me according to your word,” in response to the angel’s announcement that she will bear this miracle child, the son of God. We’re all familiar with that part. But there’s this other part that the angel includes that sometimes I think we miss about how this child will sit on the throne of his ancestor David.

The throne of David, what’s that all about? I mean, it’s a phrase that we’ve heard a lot. We hear a lot about King David and Jesus the King. We had Christ the King Sunday right before Advent. Our ears almost just kind of brush over it, “Yes, the kingdom of God. King David was a good king. Jesus, the King. Yes, of course.” But you have to remember that when Mary heard the angel’s words, she was living in a time when David and his descendents were not the kings. They were not in charge. Rome ruled the world as Mary knew it, and so the angel’s announcement was a little risky, talking about a throne of David. The angel is harkening back to a promise that was made long ago, a promise we heard retold in our reading from II Samuel this morning and referred to in the Psalm. How God took this little shepherd boy and made him into a king and promised that his ancestors would rule over Israel in peace and tranquility. They would have rest from their enemies. They would be planted and be disturbed no more. A promise the descendents of David didn’t keep up their end of. They broke the covenant with God over and over, and they were conquered by foreign armies. But God did not forget the promise. God never forgets the promise.

And so here is the angel with this message of promise and this message of hope, but it’s also a dangerous message. David’s throne will be occupied once more. The kingdom of God is back in business. And if you’re Rome, that’s treason. If you’re Rome, that’s betrayal. That’s revolution. When Mary says, “Let it be with me according to your word,” she is not only assenting to carry God’s child, she is also agreeing to participate in a revolution that will completely turn the world around. Revolution, now that’s a word we’ve been hearing a lot more these days as the world changes so quickly. And none of us knows how things are going to turn out. If an angel appeared to one of us with a message of world-changing significance, how many of us would find it easy to say with Mary, “Let it be with me according to your word”? We might be tempted to quote another Beatles’ song, “You say you want a revolution? Well, you

know, we'd like to see the plan." We'd like to know how this is going to work out, God. Of course, we want the world to be a better place. We want the burdens of oppression to be lifted. We want the oppressed to be set free, but are we ready for our world to be turned around. I mean, most of us have enough going on as it is, right? We want Mother Mary to be that reassuring, comforting Mother Mary that says, "Let it be, let it be," instead of, "Let it be with me. Let it be done to me according to your revolutionary and mysterious and earth-shaking word."

Now I honestly don't know if Mary knew what she was getting herself into when she said, "Let it be." And maybe that's the good news for us, that we don't have to understand everything. When Mary said, "Let it be," she was agreeing to participate in a revolution, but she didn't know how it was going to play out. She didn't know how this throne of David thing was going to work out. She simply agreed to carry a child in her body, a child that would be born to fulfill the promise that God had made to God's people. As I said, God never forgets the promise. And God continues to promise us a holy and a just governance, the throne of David, the reign of God with Christ in charge and we are all invited to participate.

We don't need to understand how it's all going to work. We don't need to have our lives in order. We don't need to be people of import. Consider who Mary was, a no-name unwed, teenager betrothed to a carpenter in a no-name town called Nazareth. Consider King David, a shepherd of the field but given a promise by God. We don't have to have it all figured out to participate in a revolution. We have to be willing to carry the seed of change inside of us. What seed of change have we been asked to carry for the Kingdom? What tiny little speck of revolution is already growing in our hearts waiting to be born, waiting to be made real and tangible on this earth? We come here Sunday after Sunday seeking words of wisdom, seeking comfort in our times of trouble, seeking reassurance and we also come here to discern what God has given us to bear, that it might grow. We come here to nourish it with word and worship and sacrament, and we come here to name it as our saving grace. What has God given each of us to carry?

Now, carrying it won't always be comfortable, as any woman who's been pregnant can tell you. Pregnancy is never easy. But as anyone who's ever had a child can tell you, when what we've been given to bear is born, there is great joy and it changes our lives forever. A revolution. Now, there are those of us who are revolutionary in more of a stereotypical sense, out on the streets with signs and protesting, challenging the powers and principalities of our world, challenging the injustice. Many of us in this room might find it difficult to see ourselves among them. Revolution takes many forms. I want us to remember that when Mary agreed to be a part of that revolution, it didn't involve being on a street corner with a sign. It involved being willing to say yes. To say yes to what God had asked her to do. Say yes to carrying something very small inside of her, but something that would grow and grow and be born into a man that she would eventually follow all the way to the cross.

God give us grace to prepare room inside of ourselves for your promise to be fulfilled, for us to carry seeds of change that you have put and given us to bear. Let it be with us according to your disturbing, revolutionary and mysterious word. Help us to say with Mary, "Let it be." The pregnancy will not be easy. It never is. But the joy to the world when we bear what God has given us will be glorious. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Let it be. Let it be.