

To Sing a Song that will change the world  
Luke 1  
SMPC

There are 7 words that I think about each Advent, and maybe even more often than that, which are spoken to Mary the mother of Jesus, by the angel Gabriel. They are 7 words which can touch and even transform our lives, our attitudes and maybe our mission and ministry every day, not just during Christmas time. One thing for certain, they changed Mary's life.

Those 7 words are: FOR NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD

Those 7 words changed her life forever, and in Luke's gospel immediately led her to a song we love to hear - that beautiful Song of Mary, we know as the Magnificat.

A well-known missionary named Stanley Jones once said that the Magnificat was the most radical, revolutionary song ever sung since the foundation of the world.

In the Magnificat, (which you might remember is called that because of the first word in the Latin translation) what Mary is singing about is that God is a joyous God a singing God and that God goes into the least likely places and sings a song of hope.

You and I know that God's Spirit goes into places where people are on a pedestal, and often makes them rethink that pedestal. God's spirit can change the social order, finding people of low estate in societies eyes, as Mary felt, and exalting them and lifting them and giving them a place of hope.

We know God likes to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

So Mary's song, the Magnificat could also be titled with those 7 words, FOR NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.

I can't think of anything more important right now in our community, our state, our nation, our world than those 7 words. Our world needs to sing that song. Or maybe you have a situation that calls for that song.

I have to believe that if we were to understand how Mary might have heard the word from the Angel, we might have found them very disturbing. And the song that she sang in response to hearing that surprising message was filled with improbable things which God has done and will do.

Hear the words of that song - remember what they say - For instance, scattering the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, bringing down the powerful from their thrones, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, sending the rich away empty.

All of those things might be considered at the very least improbable if not impossible to a lowly servant as Mary describes herself.

With that song, she tells the world she is open to the wider purposes of God's will, even if she doesn't understand it, even if it is not clear how that is going to happen.

I don't know about you, but I can think of some situations now which seem impossible. When I was preparing this message on Thursday, the news was that over 3,000 of our fellow citizens had died on one day of COVID. That seemed like an unreal catastrophe, and it happened again the next day. All while there is no help financially coming for those who are unable to work because of the pandemic.

I was watching some media coverage of this ongoing tragedy, and, while they were lamenting this, and just taking an account of things, analysts were also wondering "how can this be?" "Is this who we are" "How are we allowing this to happen"?

There was a moment during a split screen where medical people were feverishly working in an ICU and on the other screen was an anti-mask protest, and one sign at the protest read "99 percent survival rate. What is the big deal?" That sign and those protests were juxtaposed right next to scenes from a desperate ICU.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, one thing I know. Jesus left the 99 and went to seek and save the 1.

That is who we really are - or who we should be.

In reaction to that sign and that who-cares attitude, Professor Eddie Glaude of Princeton said, "We need a new moral and social contract between each other...the moral and social contract in our nation has been shredded. What are our obligations to each other? what are our sense of concerns to each other?"

"We have to imagine a different way of being with each other. We have to find a way beyond right and left and actually re-embrace a notion of compassion and find a way to acknowledge our relationship, our care for each other."

But then he said, "I do not know how that is going to happen."

How are we going to do that? It seems impossible, but we know nothing will be impossible with God.

Mary's song is a song that could change the world, especially for people who wonder, "How can this be happening?"

In this chapter of Luke that God comes to a lowly teenage girl, then God comes to shepherds in the hills, God comes to ordinary people, not kings, even mad kings, not the powerful, but to those who feel abandoned, powerless, marginalized, thrown aside by society.

Those who are forgotten, marginalized by life. God picks us up and gives us a voice so that we can sing, sing to all the world.

We need to hear that song again this Advent.

After all, many of our favorite Christmas stories are about transforming impossible situations, aren't they? 'A Christmas Carol' - Charles Dickens not only saves Tiny Tim, poor and marginalized Bob Cratchit, but he also saves Ebenezer Scrooge, the rich and powerful.

'It's a Wonderful Life', the entire community saves George from certain financial ruin after his encounter with the angel.

Even the Grinch who stole Christmas, is about doing something previously thought impossible.

I find Dr. Seuss is especially appropriate this year, when his famous character the Grinch observes about Christmas:

"It came without ribbons  
It came without tags  
It came without packages boxes or bags  
And he puzzled and puzzled till his puzzler was sore  
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before  
What if Christmas, he thought,

Doesn't come from a store  
What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more!"

The song that Mary sang after hearing this incredible news, is a song that is not just for big social justice issues I think. It is a song for anyone who feels marginalized, left out in the cold, forgotten by the world.

It is a song about rebirth, renewal, transformation.

My wife Caroline and I were reminiscing about what Christmas shopping used to be like - no, not all the way back in 2019, but even before!

The big thing where we grew up was to go into downtown Pittsburgh where all the great department stores were, with their windows decorated, and 9 or 10 floors of merchandise.

But I can remember one night long ago, I had gone into town myself, Christmas shopping on a freezing cold night. I wasn't finding anything I was looking for. Christmas was just a few days away, and it was just one of those days. Nothing was going right.

As I walked out of the store into the cold, empty handed, I heard a tune coming from somewhere, outside on the street. I went around the corner, and there was the sound of a single solitary French Horn - the Salvation Army bell ringer was holding his French Horn up to his mouth on this freezing night, I don't know how, and he was playing the melody for Silent Night.

And it was a reminder that no matter what else is happening, God had not forgotten about me. Music has a way of transforming our environment and speaking to our spirits. God helps us to sing songs which can change the world. Mary's song changed the world.

God's message to Mary through this messenger Gabriel means that God asks us to take the ordinary settings of life, even the difficult and challenging settings, and make them extra ordinary. God places us, ordinary people all over this area to make life extra ordinary, to lift up the lowly, to make people feel the presence of God. To re-embrace a notion of compassion for each other as the professor said.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and that French Horn player, you and me, are all here for a purpose greater than ourselves. We are here to sing a song that will change the world, that people everywhere, and all of us need to hear.

The 7 words of our song are: For Nothing Will Be Impossible With God. Where are the least likely places in your life where God may speak a word of hope this season?

As Mary told the angel, Let it be with me Lord, according to your word.