

You Are a Blessing

Luke 1:26-38

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

December 1, 2024

Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Each night as I rocked him before bed, I would put on a CD of the song titled “Lullaby” by The Chicks. I would sing along words that I hoped would root themselves in Cameron’s heart. “How long do you wanna be loved? Is forever enough, is forever enough? How long do you wanna to be loved? Is forever enough? 'Cause I'm never, never giving you up” (“Lullaby” from album *Taking the Long Way*, The Dixie Chicks, 2006).

While I knew that he would grow up and be unable to recall those exact moments, still it mattered to me that I whisper those lyrics in his ear, planting the seeds of a message I wanted him to never forget - that he was and always would be loved.

And isn't that what we do? Especially with the children in our lives, we speak messages over and over again that we hope will take root. Sometimes, like I did with my children, we start that before they can even speak. Sometimes, we look preschoolers in the eye like the nanny Aibileen in the movie *The Help* does with little Mae Mobley, when she says, “You is kind. You is smart. You is important” (*The Help*, DreamWorks Pictures, 2011). Sometimes, like I do even today as my 16-year-old Teegan sleeps, we whisper simple but important words like, “I love you.” Sometimes, like my own grandpa did with each of his grandchildren, we pull children and teens aside at important transitions in their lives and remind them of their best selves.

Throughout Advent and Christmas this year we are going to ask the question: What words might Mary and Joseph have been whispering in Jesus’ ears? What words might Mary have hoped would take root in him as she nursed him to sleep? What words might Joseph have offered to shape his young son as they worked side by side? What were the words that Jesus heard from the beginning?

Today we start that journey with the story of Mary learning that she would have a child. And the words we begin with are words first spoken of Mary, but words we feel certain she whispered in Jesus’ ear from the moment she first held him.

Luke introduces us to young Mary. Mary, living in a small town that people didn't really pay attention to. Mary, a girl becoming a woman, looking with anticipation toward what her life would hold. Mary, surprised by a visit from an angel and an announcement of a child.

And before we move too quickly on to the announcement that leads us to Jesus, it is important to pause at the beginning of this story, when the angel comes on the scene and calls Mary favored one of God...blessed by God...blessed, as she would learn, to be a blessing. This ordinary woman from an ordinary place was regarded with favor by God.

Karoline Lewis, in a commentary she wrote on this passage says, “For various and sundry reasons, this Lutheran girl, and a preacher’s kid, ended up in a Catholic high school. Thinking about this passage, I remembered being amazed and even surprised when I first attended an Annunciation Day

All contents copyright of the author.

mass at San Domenico School for Girls. I had some sense that as a Lutheran this was neither an event nor day that we acknowledged or celebrated. I was perplexed and considered the rationale for and reasons behind why our classes would start an hour late that day. But the primary image that came to my mind is being surrounded by girls, by my friends, and thinking, God has looked with favor on us. The feeling that I remember from that day in the midst of unfamiliar ritual and religiosity is that God had regarded me.

Lewis goes on says, "It is no small thing to be regarded, to be favored, especially when you are exceedingly aware that you should not be" (Karoline Lewis [Commentary on Luke 1:26-38 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

We often forget how aware Mary would have been of her own unworthiness. And yet, the angel came and told her that God had taken note of her...that she was indeed chosen.

And so, it is hard to imagine a world where she didn't whisper those same words in Jesus' ear.

If we believe what the Bible tells us...this announcement of the expected Jesus would have come with some anxiety. It was a pregnancy that wasn't following the usual timeline. There were questions around it, including questions that Joseph had to wrestle with. Add to that the fact that they were both ordinary, small town people who would likely have never been noticed.

And yet the angel said of her unborn child, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!" (Luke 1: 32-33, Good News Bible).

"Mary, you are favored by God," said the angel, "and your child is as well."

So how can we not imagine Mary, rocking infant Jesus, whispering to him...

God has blessed you.

You are favored.

You are a blessing.

From the first breath he took, I feel certain Jesus lived with these refrains rooting themselves deep inside him, in the voice of his mother, and from the heart of God.

And, friends, these aren't only words for Jesus. Rather just as God claimed an ordinary girl named Mary and a hard working carpenter named Joseph...just as God claimed a child whose birth raised some questions...so God claims each of us.

God calls us blessed. God creates us to be a blessing.

But, what does that mean?

See, sometimes we use the word blessing in reference to experiences where things go our way. We often use blessing as if it is a synonym for lucky. Or we use it in ways that indicate that God is pulling strings for us or controlling things so they go our way.

All contents copyright of the author.

But what happens when we understand being blessed, experiencing blessing, to come with responsibility?

What if when God names us as a blessing, God names the obligation we have to make a difference in the world.

Just think about that for a minute. Because blessings aren't just about getting a close parking spot or a good medical report. When we speak words of blessing to each other we are naming our hopes, speaking affirmations, claiming the presence of God, the sacredness of our daily lives.

The angel appeared to Mary. "You are a blessing," he said. And with that proclamation came great responsibility.

The young mother cradled her newborn Jesus. "You are a blessing," she said. And with that proclamation came great responsibility.

God companions with us each day of this life's journey and if we listen closely we will hear, "You are a blessing." And with that, as unexpected as it might seem, we, too, will be called to live lives of great responsibility, lives where we live in ways that don't only claim our own blessedness, but help others see that they, too, are God's favored ones.

May it be so.