Luke 1:26-38 (47-55)

She was just a young woman – one raised within the Jewish faith so she might have known about *tikkun olam* or being part of her faith tradition’s work of repairing the world. But was she prepared for an angel telling her that God had chosen her to be the bearer of a baby – God birthed into the world? What must have gone through her mind? We are told she questions ‘how this could be?’ – the physical possibility of this event, but there is more, isn’t there? She has probably heard the reminder that “nothing is impossible for God” but could that have anything to do with her? We warn young women today that there is more than just a sweet baby to hold. There is the responsibility of parenting – nurturing a child. It must have taken great courage and trust to say yes to this proposition from the angel, Gabriel.

To be sure, Gabriel tries to be reassuring – telling Mary not to be afraid and also telling her about her elderly cousin, Elizabeth who is also with child. Hmmm – Elizabeth had longed for a child but that hadn’t been on Mary’s most wanted list - at least not yet. Mary had probably heard the many stories of other women who had longed for children and then when they finally conceived, their children were destined for God’s work in the world. There was Sarai who laughed when she learned she’d have a child in her old age, but she was blessed with a son, Isaac. Hannah had also longed for a child and her longing is answered with the birth of Samuel. Mary may recognize that she is joining a chorus of faithful women over time – women whose hope rested in God at work in the world. The angel just greeted her as “favored one” but what might that mean?

Whatever went through her mind – even if it was the realization that this event could affect her betrothal to Joseph – or that she had some vague glimpse of a future as mother of Jesus – it is her response that reaches to the heart of the matter. Her response is much like that of other major figures in our faith story as they’ve recognized God’s call in their lives: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah . . .”Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” Just “let it be” even if that changes the whole course of the future. Some would say that Mary was just young and naïve. I don’t want to idealize her too much, because I believe the whole point is that God works through very human persons – like you and I, not to take advantage of them, but works through their trust and faithfulness – so Mary’s “let it be – according to your word” is a statement that says. “I’m willing to let God guide the days ahead”. That has to be one of the hardest challenges – at least for me – for our generation. Can we relinquish our sense of being in control – to let God? And that Mary has some sense of what that “God-future” might be is clear in the song she sings while she is with Elizabeth. It’s a song that turns the power arrangements of this world on their ear.

I’m not suggesting some ‘veneration of Mary’ scheme – only for us to recognize what was at the heart of her decision. To say it almost sounds heretical in this time when most of us speak as if we are fully in charge of our own futures – but what Mary did was to place her future in God’s hands – in essence to give the gift of her future, entrusting that to God. There’s no ‘what’s in it for me?’ question. She entrusted her whole self to God and by so doing I believe she discovered what is at the heart of living.

Perhaps it isn’t happening so much this year because of the pandemic but I can recall years when the focus was on what you were getting or on some crazy rush to find the “in gift” of the year. At times like those I wonder if people know the story of the wonderful gift Mary gave us all. But then I hear other stories that give me hope like this story from Nancy Gavin. It’s been around for a while but it’s worth repeating.

Love shared at Christmas!