

“From Fear to Freedom”

Luke 1:26-56

5/9/10

Read Luke 1:26-38

This morning, Mother’s Day, I want to hold up Mary. And not just that she was a mother, but a woman of faith who was called by God, overcoming her fear as she transitioned into obedience, which really is freedom to live as God wants for our lives.

She is an example for us in how to live in expectant waiting for what God is doing. And we know, that is not always an easy thing to do.

We have come through our close look at our mission statement. Last week was the culmination as we are called to Pass It Around! So where do we go from there?

We probably have heard the story, usually not in May, but know well that Mary went on to become a model of faith and obedience to God as she gave birth to the Messiah, God’s Son, Jesus.

But there were some steps Mary walked through to get her to that point of freedom.

Think about Mary, the mother of Jesus, and all the transitions in life she went through, as most mothers do. Single to married to mother of Jesus to watching Him die and then live again and finally watching Him leave the earth. Pretty much the max for any mom I would think. Many new outlooks on life in her time.

What’s happening in your life right now?

Oh, nothing you say? Well, be prepared, because this message we hear this morning from Mary makes it clear that God is always at work, whether we see it or not, whether we want it or not.

Everyday is new.

New possibilities, new people you will encounter, new challenges you face, whether large or small, each moment a new outlook on all this.

Maybe right now you are dealing with a new outlook on life, from facing retirement, or facing life with an illness, or a new relationship. We know how we go through such a range of emotions and experiences in life and those transitions in between.

Perhaps the transition you’re in right now is from a new mission, or purpose you’ve been given. Maybe God has called you out and you’re sitting here this morning wondering how in the world you are going to do this and what it will look like. Maybe it’s with a new job, or a renewed sense of purpose you had lost for a while, or someone to reach with God’s love.

God lays out the plan for Mary, the vision for what is to come, and how it will happen, that is, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift of promise—of hope, of a future of which Mary could not possibly fully comprehend.

So how do we handle all this? How do we handle transitions, that waiting for God’s work to be fulfilled within and through us? You learn a lot about people when they’re waiting for something. Watch people in a long line on a Saturday at Wal-Mart. You see the look of initial disbelief when they see the wait. Then comes some looks of confusion: “What’s taking so long? I don’t understand.” Then, if you don’t just accept that it’s going to take a while, in comes anger—why does she have so many coupons, why is his credit card not working, c’mon!

So by the time you get to check out, you’re simply exhausted.

How do you handle the initial reality of what God is calling you to do?

Mary is perplexed. Actually, Luke says she is much perplexed. Gabriel said she was afraid.

The reality is that sometimes when God speaks, when we feel God at work within us, when God is directing us in a certain way, **it can be challenging**.

Why?

Well, think about it, there are times we simply don't expect to hear from God. At least not in our ordinary lives.

Gabriel didn't visit a queen or princess, but a young girl betrothed to a carpenter. They lived in an insignificant town in an unimportant province of the Roman Empire. Nothing about their circumstances would have led anyone to suspect the role they would play in God's plan.

You might be sitting here, on a little road in Darke County, Ohio thinking the same thing. So let me say, be ready. Be ready. Because:

There's the fear of what others might think.

You think Mary didn't think about that? Mary had been chosen, "favored" by God, but what a strange blessing. You know, we think of being favored by God and think the "good life": social standing, wealth, good health. Prosperity.

But Mary, God's favored one, was blessed with having a child who was not Joseph's—a child who would later be executed as a criminal. Mary knew, and would continue to discover, that this blessing meant facing the world in an entirely different way.

Yes, God will bless you, put His hand on you, place His call upon your life, and it just might initially create a little fear inside you as to what others will think.

Fear of the changes this might bring.

Whenever we say yes to God, it means things are going to change for us. Choices you make. How you respond to people. What is important in life. Healing inside your life. Healing for someone else.

And so we wait. We wait, knowing that God is at work, that the seed is planted within us, but not seeing all that will come. And that's hard.

So what do we do?

Mary talked things over with God.

Mary asks questions. She has some dialogue with the angel.

There is nothing wrong with asking questions of God. In fact, you need to. Get into dialogue with God.

Mary sorts through her rational mind to try and get a handle on this: There is no physical, earthly way this is possible.

There are times in life, situations we are in, ministry God calls us to do, that, well frankly, seems impossible. But talk it over with God.

Devote yourself to prayer.

This is incredibly huge for us, especially in our day and age when things change so fast, life moves at a quick pace, many times out of our control. We must take time to stop. You must make that choice.

In all that is happening in our lives, in the busy-ness and motion, we would do well to learn to be still. *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,"* Isaiah 40:31 tells us. Amidst the activity of life there must be room in our lives for the wisdom of passivity. Amidst all our striving for things and achieving the goals set before us, there must be a time to receive.

Do you take time everyday to be in prayer? Simply stopping, in the quiet, even just for a few minutes to talk with God. To thank God for the day at hand. To thank God for His presence. To pour out your heart to Him from how you are feeling right now.

And, to listen. To be quiet. To sit still. To allow God to fill you with His strength and peace and joy. If you don't try it and take some time for God, that anxiety and stress and uncertainty will continue to work on you in those times of transition.

It is important to allow God to remind us that He is here, right now, and is working even though it may not look like it.

Mary gave herself to God.

Accept your situation.

How huge that one really is for us. You may not like a situation you're in, or maybe you do, but we must learn to accept where we are if we are going to be able to move on at all.

"God this is exciting, but scary." Or maybe, "God I know I need to do this, but I just don't see how." BUT, I realize this is where you have placed me and I accept this by Your grace.

Inherent in acceptance is trust—trusting that God was actually going to do what He said He would do. When we put our lives into God's hands, trusting Him even though we cannot see what's up ahead clearly, we will much better be able to accept where we are. And when we accept that, we will be more open to following His lead and how He wants to prepare us for the next phase of our lives.

Something else so important:

Mary was encouraged by Elizabeth.

God sends Mary to Elizabeth. Why?

Perhaps to give Mary someone else to confirm what she is experiencing.

There is something about not feeling like you are alone with this new thing God has put upon your heart and life. When God calls you to do something for Him—obedience—sometimes you can feel alone, scared, maybe even a little crazy. So we need others around us, someone that we can connect with and talk with and trust with what we're experiencing.

Elizabeth was six months further along with John and had some time before Mary to process this miracle God did with her.

As Ronda Scammahorn pointed out this week, Elizabeth was serving like a mentor to Mary. How important it is to have those people in our lives.

We are here to,

Encourage one another:

to find that strength which comes from the Body of Christ. For us in the Church of the Brethren, community, the faith community, living as brothers and sisters in Christ is central to our walk with Christ. We do not go this journey alone, nor were we ever meant to.

If you are not connected closely with the church, I encourage you to do so. I know that can be difficult if you don't have close relationships right now with anyone, but that is where the rest of us who do have a huge responsibility, which is to reach out to those who are searching, who need to be connected, who need to know the strength and joy which comes from the community of faith.

If Mary stayed fearful instead of faithful, how vastly different her life would have been.

If our heroes of the faith—Miriam, Hannah, Esther, Sarah, Rahab, Mary Magdalene—were fearful instead of faithful then they would have gone back to their farms, jobs, families and never would have made an impact on the world as they did.

Maybe when all these people first thought about doing what they did they felt that twinge of fear that we sometimes experience when the out-of-the-ordinary is called forth from us by God, but their faith in God, their assurance of His power and control over their lives, brought them from fear into the freedom to do what they were called to do.

We talk sometimes about what will happen, in negative ways, if we do this or that new thing, or do something that really is a risk. What will happen if I reach out to that person, start that program, or change what we're used to doing? But the question I think to ask is: "What will happen if we do NOT act? What will happen if we do not take those risks for God and stretch our faith a little?" Nothing. Nothing will happen. Things will remain just as they are.

But, as Mary found out, if we fear God and nothing else of this world, you cannot begin to imagine the possibilities.

End sermon with Magnificat, **Luke 1:46-55**. (Do NOT put on screen) (Mary Carroll Blocher)