

12-08-19

Luke 1:26-38

“Intrude” Advent Series: Mary

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A little 7-year-old boy in my previous congregation told his grandmother one day, “I really love God. I just wish he wasn’t watching me all the time.” Whether you feel good about it or not, God is ever-present, always watching you. He’s extremely aware of everything going on in your life.

Even more, the Bible teaches us, God is always active in our lives. He’s continually intervening, infringing, entering our personal space, intruding. Sometimes he comes with healing, strength, and comfort. Sometimes he comes to correct, admonish, and guide. Sometimes God challenges us, and gives us chances to serve him and his people. Sometimes he just listens patiently to our fears and worries. Sometimes God enters our lives, and all he does is give us the blessed reminder that he’s by our side, that he’s with us in love through all of our roughest times. He does all this through his Word, by his Holy Spirit, using other people around us, via the situations in our everyday lives. In many ways, our God is extremely active and involved in your life and in mine.

Now, here’s the thing. We can either push God away, or we can humbly yield. Our God is all-powerful, but he doesn’t force himself on us. So we can either say, “Sorry, God, I don’t have time for you today;” or we can say, “Lord, I need all of you that I can get in my life. Lord, please bring your help and blessing to my life. Lord, I humbly yield when you come knocking in my life.”

I heard a cute little story a couple weeks ago that reminds me of our God. I ran into a church member in the produce department at Harris Teeter. As we stood talking, this guy

told me about a recent trip he took to Italy. His family had a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party for his grandmother, who lives in a tiny village in Sicily. The people of the village there all know his grandmother, and she knows all of them. Despite being 100 years old, she goes around the village every day, knocking on doors, checking in on everybody, making sure everybody's ok. The villagers have a nickname for this little lady. They all call her "La Tutzala." It means "the knocker," the one who's always involved in everyone else's business.

Now, I'm not saying that God is a little old Sicilian lady. But God is like the ultimate La Tutzala. He's the most powerful La Tutzala, the most compassionate, the most merciful, the most resourceful and helpful La Tutzala. He already knows everything that's happening in the village and in your life; and yet he comes knocking. God comes with healing, with comfort, with guidance, with blessing after blessing for you.

And, again, you can either push God away, or you can humbly yield.

Mary humbly yielded. Never was there ever a greater intrusion by God into a human being's life than in what happened to Mary. Here she is, an innocent young lady, a complete unknown, growing up in a remote little town. She's planning a wedding, probably an arranged wedding, with Joseph. But she's not living with Joseph. Mary's a virgin, who's never been with any man. She's living a quiet life in a quiet town, when suddenly one day God enters her life in outrageous, unbelievable fashion.

God sends the angel Gabriel. He announces that Mary's going to have a baby, a son. Mary's response? "How? I can't be pregnant. I'm a virgin." The angel says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will

overshadow you. The child to be born will be the Son of God. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

One minute she’s just ordinary, inconspicuous Mary. The next, she learns she’s going to be the mother of the Christ Child. God encroaches on her life in a massive way. Pastor Lew and I were talking about this Mary story the other day, and he remarked, “Wow, talk about literally invading someone’s personal space!” That’s what God did to Mary.

Mary, naturally, is flabbergasted, stunned, overwhelmed. But then what does she do? Mary humbly yields. She doesn’t push God away, or decline this tremendous responsibility. She humbly yields. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.”

What a beautiful, amazing response! I know we Lutherans don’t put Mother Mary on the same pedestal that our Roman Catholic friends do. But let’s not miss out on how remarkable was this young woman’s humble yielding to God. Mary is a superb model for us of Christian humility, and Christian receptivity. When God comes knocking, intervening in her life, Mary is respectful. Mary consents.

In her humble yielding, Mary foreshadows the path her son would follow, too. Her child, whose one-of-a-kind birth we celebrate again in a couple of weeks, later dies a one-of-a-kind death. Jesus sacrifices himself on the cross, suffering and dying for our sins. Jesus has to follow not his own will, but his Father’s will. God’s Son gives up his very life, so God’s people can be forgiven, so people like you and me can have a new kind of relationship with God.

See, human nature will cause us, over and over, to push God away. Sin makes us arrogant. Sin makes us self-serving, not God-serving. But the death of Jesus pays for our

sin. When sinners like us are called to faith by the Gospel, we're reconciled to God. We're reconnected to him by grace.

And it's that same grace that enables us to resist sin, to stop pushing God away, and to be humble – truly humble -- before him. The arrogant sinner doesn't think he or she needs God's intervention and intrusion. But the forgiven sinner, whose heart has been touched by the grace of Jesus, can welcome God, can receive his help gratefully. You and I, in those moments of uncertainty and decision, when we're either going to push God away or humbly yield, can count on God being with us in those moments. We can count on his grace. We can rely on his help, to be humble and to be yielding, even as Mary was.

What a great joy it is, in these pre-Christmas days of Advent, to know that God is always watching us, but is always entering our lives with his grace. Amen.