

Sermon – 2nd Advent
Luke 1:46-56
December 10, 2017

“Regarding Promises”

I read recently that Americans check their phones about 150 times a day or every 9 ½ minutes – assuming we never sleep that is. If we do get 8 hours in, the rate drops to every 6 ½ minutes! Workplace and education experts say a “*crisis of attention*” is one of the biggest problems of our time. A century ago American Psychologist William James concluded that our life experience amounts to whatever we’ve paid attention to. There’s no arguing that today many of us are astonishingly distracted – any train of thought we might get rolling gets derailed by another short message received at a short interval with short bings or buzzes announcing their arrival. We often don’t even express thoughts with words – why spell when you can use an emoji!

On the other end of the spectrum of a world defined by rapid messages rapidly responded to is Mary, the Mother of our Lord. Her song, which forms our lesson today, is testimony to how blessed someone can be when attention they pay to what God has to say. In Luke 1:26-38 - the so called “*Annunciation*” – the angel Gabriel told Mary she’d found favor in God’s sight and would bear God’s Son Jesus. Mary, on hearing this, goes to visit to Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist in what is called “*The Visitation*.” Upon hearing Mary arrive the child in Elizabeth’s womb “leaps for joy”, and she immediately says to Mary; “*blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.*”

Mary sang – because she believed. Is that not why we sing? Martin Luther marveled at the story of Mary. But unlike the adoration of Mary that for most in Luther’s time focused on the fact she was a virgin of low standing, Luther marveled at Mary’s faith. Luther marveled at what for him was the greatest miracle of all in this story – that God regarded a human being – a sinner – so highly as this. In that Luther found his deepest kinship with Mary, and so should we. That a virgin could conceive is indeed a miracle but for God not a terribly difficult one. That God should enter the womb of a woman is amazing – but again, for God not impossible.

That Mary believed this is what God was going to do – save the world and her by becoming a human through her – that is by no means a minor thing for God to get a human to believe. Mary sang not because of her virginity or her humility, but because God regarded her in such a way – she sang because she believed what God said to her – Luther went so far as to say she conceived because she believed what God said to her. That is why of her Elizabeth could and did say; “*blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.*”

What about you and I? Mary in her song speaks about others and in that regard speaks about all of us. What is it that God has spoken and each of us in our own “humble estate” does well to pay attention to? Mary begins with “the mighty” – we’ll call them the movers and shakers of today. Psalm 2:10-11 says “*therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.*” To “the rich” Proverbs 22:2 says “*rich and poor have this in common – the Lord is maker of them all.*” To understand our common humanity and God’s common concern for everyone no matter their standing in life is a great blessing. To you who are less than happy in this season that force feeds us happiness, Jesus in Matthew 11:28 says “*come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

Many today lack self-confidence or self-esteem, despite being able to create images for ourselves in a minute or two via social media. Jesus in Matthew 10:29-31 says “*are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father...so don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*” Many young believers think, often justifiably, that the church overlooks them. Yet I Timothy 4:12 says “*don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*” Despite encouraging economic trends in our country many workers today are un or underemployed. Isaiah 41:10 says “*do not fear, I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*” To the church Jesus in John 14:6 says “*I am the way, the truth and the life,*” and Paul speaking on God’s behalf in Ephesians 2:10 says “*for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

And to every last one of us Jesus said “*remember, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” Blessed is she (and he) who has believed that what the Lord has said to them will be accomplished. Remember God does not speak except in love – even his rebukes. Yes, Jesus is Mary’s child – but to Luther the manger and the cross were never far apart – and the cross makes him ours. Isaiah 9:10 says “*unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.*” This is where we need pay the most attention you see – not to believe that Jesus is the Son of a humble Virgin as to believe that Jesus is ours, that God regards us so very highly. To believe such makes you blessed beyond imagination – and such faith can do no other – than sing. AMEN

