

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
December 24, 2017 – 4th Sunday in Advent
Luke 1:26-38

Have any of you seen the movie “Yes Man,” starring Jim Carrey? Even if you haven’t, the title gives the plot away. The lead character is challenged to say “yes” to everything, and his life is transformed as he does what is uncharacteristic for him – to try things he never would have considered trying or was afraid of doing.

Today we hear the story of the patron of our little church here in Nanoose Bay. St. Mary. Mary the mother of Jesus who said “yes,” and the world has never been the same.

She was “perplexed” by what the angel’s words, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.” Why was the Lord with her? She might have been thinking, “Why me? What have I done to deserve the Lord’s attention? Why am I favoured?”

This situation was highly unusual. She was just a peasant girl, like all the others. There was nothing special about her. And this angel had startled her. She was wary. And the angel read her mind, “Do not be afraid, Mary (the angel knew her name!), for you have found favour with God.” There was that favour thing again. What would make God favour her in particular?

Then the angel looked into the future. And told her what he saw. “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.” Jesus?! Mary would know what this name Jesus meant, the name derives from a word that means ‘saviour’ –

specifically, 'the promise of one who saves God's people.' Put yourself in Mary's sandals. What is this that you are being told?

And as soon as you frame the question, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" the angel replies, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."

There you have it. Mary is going to be drawn into the Holy Trinity: the Holy Spirit, the Most High, and the Son of God. She's the first to hear of it. And she's going to experience the power of the Trinity firsthand!

And after telling Mary that her cousin who was barren is now carrying a child, the angel points out, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

Unlike Sarah who in her old age was told she would become pregnant and laughed, Mary does something different. Why? Maybe because she's young and unjaded. But Mary seems to make a sudden decision as she says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." The angel takes this as her consent and departs. Mission accomplished.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Mary doesn't try and argue, rationalize or defend herself. She must realize she has only one choice, to say "yes," or to say, "no." Who can argue with God? It doesn't make sense. But we do it all the time. We act as though God doesn't know us by name, that we weren't created by God. We continue to believe, even though Jesus came to

tell us differently all those thousands of years ago, that we have to earn God's love and attention.

It can sound humble to argue with God, but really it isn't. It's a way of trying to get the upper hand and tell God how things should be. It's actually the easy way. Because we stay safe. We stay the course. We go for what's familiar.

What's difficult is to be open, especially when we're startled or surprised when something unexpected happens. It's easy to say "no" to the requests for help, comfort, companionship; to the invitations to try things we've never tried before and have always said we didn't like or weren't interested in.

And it's very difficult to simply say "yes" and receive what is being offered. Especially when we don't know what it entails but suspect there's a lot at stake.

I've asked this before – but let's try it again. How many of you enjoying helping others? OK. Now, how many of you are comfortable receiving help yourselves? Or receiving unexpected gifts?

The good news is that "nothing is impossible with God," so it's not over til it's over, (and not even then!)

We can learn to check our impulse to defend ourselves and keep things the way they've always been. That is, if we want to enter more deeply into relationship with the One who came to set us free from our fears, preferences, and self-doubt. It's as easy, and as difficult, as simply receiving that which is freely given.

Let's try it out right now. Instead of praying for others, take one full moment and allow yourself to receive the love being given in

abundance this very moment. The love of friends, family and the One who created all whom you love, and who you love. Imagine if you will, the love surrounding you as golden light, warm and heavy enough for you to feel it all over your body.

Can you say “yes,” to this love which is our birthright? Which will carry us through life if only we are willing to say “yes.”

You can't earn love, you don't deserve it. From God or from those who love you. Don't argue with others. Don't try and dissuade them from loving you. If anything, work on your own ability to receive the love offered you; the love that created you; that sustains you and that longs for your love in return.

Today is the 4th Sunday in Lent and the focus for today is -
_____?????. You got it. **Love.**

If there's anything Mary models for us, it's her willingness to say “yes” and to be open to how Love would enter her and create new life.

What new life is waiting to be born in you this coming year? Will you be ready to receive the gift of new life offered by the One who is continually calling us to follow onto the path of Love. Love of neighbour, love of God, love of self. The holy Trinity incarnate.

Amen.

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