

## Let it Be with Me

Poem; Luke 1:26-38 Ute

Molitor, First Congregational Church, Camden, UCC, December 1, 2024

### There Was a Time I Disdained Hope

But now  
what can I do  
but marvel  
as hope grows  
like a seed  
without soil,  
putting down  
roots despite  
lack. And isn't  
that what hope  
is—a sprout  
that grows  
when conditions

are poor,  
as if to prove  
that sometimes  
potential  
depends less  
on what  
surrounds us,  
more on what  
is living  
through us.

—Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

### Luke 1:26-38

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her: Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you. She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' God will give him the throne of his father David; He will rule Jacob's house forever— no end, ever, to his kingdom." Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man." The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God. And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you*

*see, is impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Yes, I see it all now: I’m ready to serve God. Let it be with me just as you say.” Then the angel left her.*

Advent is such a marvelous time in the unfolding of our faith journey. It is a time of hoping and awakening to all that is possible with God regardless of our external circumstances. We are awaiting an in-breaking of God into the world, into our own lives, that promises to leave us forever changed. Today, we hear how two women of very different ages become the seemingly improbable agents of this in-breaking. They model for us a courageous way of being in the world in our own place and time.

There is Elizabeth who, despite her advanced age, is pregnant with John the Baptist who will pave the way for the Christ-child. And we have Elizabeth’s much younger relative, Mary, who receives a visit from the archangel Gabriel who announces this wild hope: the very Spirit of God will come upon her and engender this child with her, not her fiancé Joseph. As a young woman in her culture and a member of the peasant class, she did not have a voice, but her family’s honor was tied to her virtue and chastity. A misstep, real or perceived, could bring shame on her family and end her prospects for marriage and financial security. It could potentially even end her life. The stakes for Mary are high considering Gabriel’s invitation to take a lead role in this story of healing and liberation.

These stakes also highlight the God’s countercultural ways to manifest not in the halls of power but among the marginal and seemingly disempowered and wherever God finds open and courageous hearts.<sup>1</sup> We are already being signaled that the power of love and

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, the story stays within the family lineage of king David of long ago from which the Messiah was supposed to come and establish the realm of God, perhaps to create a sense of legitimacy but imagine moving beyond this. In fact, if we put this story into our own world context, where might God choose to be born in a similarly unexpected way? Perhaps a Palestinian refugee camp or among displaced people in the Sudan or the Ukraine? Among the residents of Homeworthy in Rockport awaiting the chance of a home of their own?

hope which will be yielded by the Christ child will be of a very different quality and purpose than that of those in love with power in the world.

The angel Gabriel is sent to Mary because she carries a startling beauty within her. Her aliveness, presence, curiosity and courage are known to and valued by God. In a subsequent scripture passage known as the “Magnificat” (1:46-56), Mary becomes an outspoken and feisty witness to how God will topple unjust leaders and establish justice and equity in our world. Her gender, age, wealth, education or social standing do not matter. Her understanding of the world and God’s power matter as does her willingness to say a trusting “yes” to God. Mary and Elizabeth model for us what it means to step into the unknown in faith trusting that something powerful will be born in and through them, literally flowing into and out of their own being. They are becoming agents of incarnation, of God becoming manifest in their own midst and within them. Their hope is brave and fierce in the face of circumstances and can inspire us to seek the same.

The poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trimmer describes hope as something that often sprouts when “conditions are poor as if to prove that sometimes potential depends less on what surrounds us, more on what is living through us.” I hear in that as an affirmation of the gift of learning to go with the flow of love and life as they manifest in our lives. There is a quality of coming to recognize and enter this flow, this giftedness, even when we have experienced disappointment, harm, loss or disillusionment of some kind.<sup>2</sup> There is faith in the seed of hope that can grow even when we believe that the soil is poor or somehow compromised.

Today, many of us are discouraged by the recent election and fearful of how our values, interconnections, institutions, and the very well-being of planet may be undermined in

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<sup>2</sup> The poet lost her son to suicide.

the coming years. Some of us have just lost a loved one and are facing living on this earth without their embodied presence. Some of us are struggling with a difficult diagnosis or a lack of medical answers to what is ailing us. Some of us are despairing over climate change and feeling powerless to stop it. Maybe we are struggling to make friends in school. Perhaps it has been hard to put food on the table and pay the rent. Or maybe we have reached that age when we are noticing the loss of mobility or memory and are attending far too many memorial services of old friends. Embracing the idea that we could become pregnant again with hope and possibility for this world may seem like an impossibility.

The older Elizabeth in our story also reminds us that God is not done with us no matter our age or circumstance. I came across a short film which features nearly ninety-six-year-old Dot Fisher-Smith from Ashland, Oregon. We will meet her shortly. She embodies what it means to be pregnant with hope at any age as she embraces her role in the cycles of living and dying and rising again within our lifetime and beyond. Drawing on the poetry of Mary Oliver, Dot lives with the conviction that she does not want to have just visited this world. She wants to be a child of wonder and astonishment and “not cease from exploration,” as T.S. Eliot once wrote (one of her favorite poets). Dot calls this time her second childhood in which she is finally learning to play. Her years of growing up were hard and painful as she always felt like an outsider who was left feeling self-conscious and afraid.

After surviving cancer, she has learned to embrace all her life as a gift given, not earned or to be hoarded. She has learned to love her body with its increasing limitations, though she still does some yoga stretches and loves to get on swings on playgrounds. Dot is no longer afraid of what is to come and sees her purpose as giving the ineffable

shining light which is flowing through her to the world. She describes the qualities of harmlessness, harmony, gratitude and rejoicing as some of her own unique gifts of light to the world. She hopes that everyone will embrace their own uniqueness without losing touch with how we are all part of everything else not only in the present but also the past and future. There is no separation. Let's see how she articulates this:

Minutes 6:01-9:07: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-rHc8tm5\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-rHc8tm5_c)

[For those reading the sermon without access to the video: Dot affirms that we are here to explore the wonder of being in our bodies. While we are all unique, we are also one, made of the same stuff and just incarnating it differently. We are not only made of the same stuff as humans but also the trees, the starthistle or an ant climbing a mountain. She jokes about being the same as also being connected with the garbage heap that she can see in the distance as her own body will become compost.]

I am particularly struck by how she contemplates her own death. She is comforted by words by T.S. Eliot: "We die with the dying. See, they depart, and we go with them. We are born of the dead. See, they return and bring us with them."<sup>3</sup> I hear her affirming that a part of us accompanies our loved ones who die. Our own birth is interconnected with those who have already gone before us and who come to embrace us at our own transitioning. There is a circling spiraling dance of living in dying as life and love continue to be born, to die and be born again. We can embrace this flow or resist it as the divine continues to become manifest concretely in and through us throughout the generations. Gabriel Marcel wrote, "You know that you have loved someone when you have glimpsed in them that which is too beautiful to die."<sup>4</sup> We all carry the eternal within us, unbound

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<sup>3</sup> From the "Little Gidding" segment of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcel, The Mystery of Being.

by time and space. Dot embraces this idea and wants to live as gratefully and joyfully as she can until it is time to let this life-force transform into the next incarnation, whatever it may be. It is a mystery to her which she does not have to explain or even fully understand. She just has to say 'yes' to it and then give herself to every moment to truly be there, unhurried, in the here and now, trusting that the divine is manifesting in and through her. I hear Dot saying, at nearly ninety-six, *"Yes, I see it all now: I'm ready to serve God. Let it be with me just as you say."* She does so with a wild, courageous and generous heart just like Mary and Elizabeth did in their day in their unique ways.

What would happen if we all began to imagine that we were all mothers (and fathers) of God who is waiting to be born in us, as the late medieval mystic Meister Eckhart suggested? We all have a unique gift to share for the hope of the world, for the sake of future generations and in gratitude to those who have gone before us. God is not done with us yet and awaits our own "yes" to this world, this moment in time, with all its challenges and invitations. In Christ, God promises to be with us, come what may, again and again, saying that we need not be afraid. May the Holy Spirit enter us all and show us the way to serve in and through our lives! Amen.