

Adventurous Faith
Psalm 98 (N.C. Merrill) Luke 1:39-55
December 20, 2015 Alan Claassen

Christmas is a season for the imagination.

We imagine all sorts of things happening at this time of year.

We imagine that all the nations of the world
will set aside their hatreds for a moment
and let there be peace on earth.

At Christmas time we recognize that we cannot celebrate this season

by our normal everyday patterns,

so we sing hymns that are only sung at this time of the year, ,

or go watch dancing plums and mice in the Nutcracker,

or bring a tree into our home and adorn it with lights

Christmas is the season for the imagination

and that is why Christmas belongs most especially to children

for whom imagination, fantasy, and pretending comes most easily.

But children are not the only ones who can use their imagination

or else that movie, **Miracle on 34th Street**,

wouldn't delight us all so much,

as the mounds of letters to Santa

are piled in front of the judge.

The enduring quality of that movie proves more than the existence of Santa,

it proves that we all need and want to believe in what we can imagine,

a world of people caring for one another,

a world of honest people who believe the best about each other,

a world where the villains are exposed and fired.

And I must mention my personal holiday favorite,

"It's A Wonderful Life," where the evil banker, Mr. Potter is brought down,
and the humble George Bailey
is lifted up by all of the people he had helped in his lifetime.

Especially in this season we can imagine these kinds of things happening.

So this morning I want to ask you to use your imagination.

I would like you to imagine you are sitting at home one evening,
checking your e-mails,
you feel a draft and look up from your computer
and see someone who says to you,
"Hail, O Favored one, the Lord is with you!"

And before you have time to call for help
this visitor tells you not be afraid,
that you will be given a gift
that will bring you and your world, great joy.

How's your imagination doing?

I am asking you to imagine
what it was like to be Mary, hearing the angel of Gabriel
that she is soon to be Mother of Jesus, even though she is not yet married.

Now, I would like you to
Imagine the moment after the angel Gabriel leaves Mary,
the moment after the message has been delivered.

That moment is so important for the Christian story.
That moment after the angel left Mary might have been filled
with doubt, disbelief, cynicism, or fear.

Mary hears the promise of God entering into her life

and she is faced with a decision.

Do I go? Do I stay? Do I believe? Do I tell Joseph?

Mary had questions, wouldn't you?

When the angel first appeared,

Mary was greatly troubled and considered in her mind

what it meant to be greeted by angel.

Trembling and quaking and pondering

are the signs that we might be dealing with divine voices.

It is interesting to me to see the steps that Mary

went through in response to the angel's message.

Because it is may be very similar to the process

that we need to go through when Spirit speaks to us,

whether divine messengers come to us in the form of angels,

or the words of a song,

or our outrage at injustice.

However and when it is that we hear the voice

that opens our heart and soul

we have choices to make like Mary did as told in the story written by Luke.

After the angel told Mary what was going to happen,

Mary questioned the angel

saying, "How can this be?"

I find it interesting that Mary's question was,

"How can this be?"

rather than, "It can't be."

Mary was aware of the reality of her situation
but she was also open to another possibility,
something she couldn't imagine or foresee happening.

After the angel explained how it was going to happen,
(with the most unlikely of all explanations,)

Mary said, "Here I am. I am God's servant;
as you have spoken, so be it."

Let it be. Let it be in me and through me.

I think the silence we experience in times of spiritual crisis
is there for a reason.

All of our old expectations need to be cleared out,
so we can truly hear something new.

When I read this story of Mary,
and I read it as a story that explains a truth
that can't be conveyed any other way
than through the symbolic poetry of story,

I ask myself what virginity, open receptivity,
means for me, for us,
in a way that helps me understand
how I can bring to life, how we can bring to life,
the word, the promise, the moment entrusted to me?

In those moments in our life when we don't know what to do,
we can make that a holy silence,
by listening quietly,
without fear or anxiety.

And in that holy silence

when all we know is, that neither our anxieties

or our old answers are adequate to the task,

we may find the beginning of an insight,

a new vocation,

a new calling to serve the ones we love.

Most importantly, we may find that we are not alone,

we are well loved by something more than we could ask for or imagine,

If we openly receive the word of an angel like Mary did.

For us, there are times in our lives

when we need to create a simple manger scene

for our own nativity, for our own rebirth in the spirit.

This is true for us as individuals and as communities.

And as the year comes to an end,

during these short days of long nights we have time for reflection...

Are we willing to go where Wholly Love is leading us?

Are we willing to believe that in the moment,

when all we hear is silence,

or a troubling question,

or the voice of a messenger from Holy Mystery,

space is being given for a new voice, a new language.

For the voice of Holy Mystery is in the very things that happen to us each day.

Wholly Love is in every molecule of creation,

every moment, every person, every choice.

Each day God gives us our daily bread

and each day is a sacrament when we are openly receptive to it.

Trembling and trusting.

Like Pregnancy itself.

Christ is growing within us.

That which the Holy One has asked us to do we cannot do alone, never alone.

And we do not need to.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, great writer,

and one who made a practice of silent contemplation put it this way.

“For each one of us, there is only one thing necessary:

to fulfill our own destiny,

to be what God wants us to be...

our destiny is the work of two wills, not one.

God's will and ours together.

Our destiny, our vocation,

is to discover the gift we were given by God

and then, by the grace of God and good company,

let the gift heal the world that you can touch.

God heard the cries of the people

and God's response was a new human being,

a child, Jesus

who would show humanity a new way of being human,

the healing way of sustainable justice and non-violence,

And a young woman, Mary, was the first to carry that child of peace.

What happens when we allow ourselves to be open to the possibility
that Wholly Love is leading us?

Will we go where Holy Mystery is leading us?

As we move from the candles of hope, peace, joy and love
and move more closely to the Christ candle in the center of it all
may we find ourselves within the holy silence of the manger scene,
and trust the voices within ourselves
that cause us move from trembling to trust,
from isolation to service,
from scarcity to generosity.

In the quiet moment of anticipating
a young woman hears something unbelievable.
She asks, how can this love be in me?
She receives an answer and becomes the mother
who will bring the divine seed, Jesus, to life.

A divine seed has been placed within each of us,
and this congregation, this community, this planet is the garden we growing in,
stewards of the land, the heart and the song.

How can this be?

How can this be now, this year,

with all that we know that is broken in this world

Imagine all the people,
 living for today,
Imagine all the people,
 living life in peace,
Imagine all the people,
 sharing all the world,
You may say that I am a dreamer,
 but I'm not the only one
I hope some day,
You will join us
 and the world
 will live as one.

Mary believed in the promise
 and was willing to bring that promise to life.

Do you believe in the promise of that was entrusted to you?
 and are we willing to turn the promise into our practice?

Meister Eckhart, a 12th Century priest, theologian and mystic wrote,
"What good is it if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place,
 but does not take place within myself?

This then is the fullness of time:
 When the Son of God is born in us."

I think the silence we often experience in times of spiritual crisis
 is there for a reason.

We need to clear out all of our old expectations, patterns and fears

so that we can truly hear another voice,
that will light up the darkness of the silent and holy night.

Let's show up at the nativity scene of this moment
with a faith that is adventurous
and give God a little room to be a part of this story too.