

“Nothing Will Be Impossible with God”

Luke 1:26-38

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“Nothing will be impossible with God.” Of course, the context for these words is an intimate conversation the angel Gabriel has with Mary. Mary has just received a rather astounding announcement. She is going to have a baby! And the child is to have an extraordinary identity. It’s not hard for one to imagine the stunned look on her face. As Mary ponders the miraculous nature of what is about to unfold, the angel reassures her: “Nothing will be impossible with God.” Thus, the Christmas Story is laced with the language of faith.

What I believe is that this conversation between the angel and Mary is not an exclusive, one-time, conversation. It is a conversation that may take place between the angel and any one of us at any time, especially at a time that might be described as a crisis in faith or as a time of disorientation or as a time of just feeling a little bit lost. This is the angel’s work: to come to us from time to time with this awesome announcement, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

I know that not everything turns out the way I hope it will. I know that not every prayer is answered according to my specifications. Yet, I have come to believe what the angel says to Mary: when God gets involved, everything falls into the realm of possibility. Thus, I pray for healing even when it’s a stage four cancer. Thus, I assume that there is a way to mend the most fractured of relationships. Thus, I believe enemies of hundreds and thousands of year’s duration can reconcile and make peace. You may call me naïve. You may call me the eternal optimist. I prefer that you call me the guy who lives in the greatest of hope.

In my imagination, I picture Mary writing a letter to her mother about the conversation with the angel. She tells her all the details about the conception and about not fearing and about the Holy Spirit. Then, I picture Mary closing her letter with the words, “In the greatest of hope.” Now you know where I got those closing words for my sermons. I borrowed them from Mary as she writes to her mother. Is she naïve? Probably. Is she young and inexperienced? Of course. Is she open to the presence and to the miracle power of God? You bet she is! And this is why I admire her so much.

In the mid-1800’s, Dr. David Livingstone set out from Scotland by ship and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean. He then boated his way up the Zambezi River and then up the Shire River to an area known then as Nyasaland, the land of the lake people. What he found there in the Great Rift Valley was an active slave trade. He saw the great suffering and he wondered how this evil could ever be brought to an end. There is a place near Nkhota Kota where it is said that he prayed for strength to stand up to this injustice. I hope to take our mission team there in April. In this spot, it is said that an angel came to him and said, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

Dr. Livingstone then urged his home Presbyterian Church to send missionaries to establish churches and to plant the Gospel of Love. And the missionaries came. They brought with them the notions of freedom and forgiveness, the notions of justice and reconciliation, the notions of peace and respect. Within a short time, the East African slave trade had come to a grinding halt. And to this day, it is the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian that continues to lift up the way of Christ as the way to peace. When God gets involved, everything falls into the realm of possibility.

In our Confirmation class, during the December Wednesday night sessions, we have been wrestling with questions regarding the identity of Jesus. Who is he really? How are we to understand him? Though we all come to our own conclusions, wonderful hints to his identity are revealed to Mary by the angel.

“He will be great; Son of the Most High; he will inherit the throne of David; of his Kingdom there will be no end.”

Taken together, all these identifiers suggest Jesus is to be understood as a new kind of authority. Unlike the authority figures who preceded him, his greatness is measured in humility. Unlike the kings and princes before him, his power is made known in acts of sacrificial love. Unlike nations and city states before him, his Kingdom has no boundaries, no immigration laws, no need to keep anyone out! The angel reveals to Mary her child will reign in the hearts of many with a whole new kind of authority.

This new authority has nothing to do with the clothes he wears or with the horse he rides or with the stock portfolio he amasses. It has to do with the holy harmony we experience when we acknowledge his presence in our midst. His authority is that force of love which compels us to live at peace.

The angel’s visitation to Mary sets the stage for the Christmas story; indeed, it sets the stage for the whole Christian story. “Nothing will be impossible with God.” This is why I do remain in the greatest of hope. Amen.