

You May Think You're Nothing Much, But... (Advent 2)

Luke 1:26-38

December 6, 2020

First Presbyterian, Luling

To be blunt, Mary was a nobody. Not from a prominent family. Not from a big, important town. Probably not rich. Of course, she was important to her family and her friends, maybe other people from her village of Nazareth. But aside from that, it's safe to say that no one had ever taken special notice of her. She was nothing much.

We all have those thoughts, I suspect. I'm not important. Whatever I'm doing in the world doesn't amount to anything important. I'm not famous or rich or influential. I don't even know any famous or rich or influential people. I mess up on a regular basis, but even when I feel good about something I've accomplished, it isn't really a big deal to anyone but me. Even if we're a big fish in a small pond, it's a small pond. And even if we don't get mopey about these "I'm nothing much" thoughts, they're still there.

And this year, most all of us were told we aren't "essential." There are a few of us who are, but a lot of us are in the non-essential worker category. And the way that we treat essential workers, many of them under paid, over worked, unappreciated, scarcely recognized as valuable, well, I'm presuming that many essential workers also feel like they're nothing much.

This has been a difficult year, to state what is obvious to anybody. For people who find their value in their work, they've lost their jobs entirely, or had to change how they did their work, or are working so hard they don't have room in their lives for anything else. For people who find their value in caring for their families, they've either been separated and distanced from their families, or they've been with them just about every single minute since mid-March. For people who find their value in connecting with other people, well just about every familiar opportunity for that has been modified and adapted almost beyond recognition. It is all a lot. And hard. And even the most mentally healthy and strong among us have struggled. Those of us who are more emotionally fragile have suffered. We've not been able to support each other in the ways that help the most. We've not been able to grieve with familiar rituals and gatherings. I dreamed, just last night, about singing in a big church with a bunch of people. And I was happy in my dream, but also anxious and scared, because we weren't wearing masks and I knew it was dangerous. We are not the same as we were this

time last year. The losses of human lives just in our own country is a scale that we can't really comprehend. We're up to the equivalent of 9-11, every day now. I can't really fathom that. It has been, and is, and will continue to be for a while, difficult to care for ourselves and for others' mental and emotional well-being.

And it seemed important to recognize that, out loud, in church, during a time of year when it seems like so many people are pretending that things are ok. There are always people who have a difficult time getting through the holidays emotionally. There's just more of us this year.

The "Hey Mary" song that I played last week has a line in each verse that goes like this: "You seem to think you're nothing much, but heaven's coming close enough to touch, yeah, God is coming here through you."

You seem to think you're nothing much. You're right to think that things are horrible and depressing and difficult now. You're right. But if you then conclude that because things are difficult, **you're** nothing much, then you're wrong about that. How do I know?

Well, I could start way back in Genesis and tell you that God said you are a very good creation. I could stop in Psalms to say that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. I could skip ahead to Jesus, who loves you with an infinite love. I could say that I love you, and you're important to me. All of those things are true, and important.

And today, we'll add a piece to that. Gabriel came to Mary, Mary who was nothing much in the eyes of the world. And maybe Mary felt that, felt that she was nothing much. And maybe Mary felt that life was difficult and hard. But Gabriel tells her God's message for her, which is that she has found favor with God. How did she do that? Why does God favor her in particular? No reason is given. God chooses Mary, who seems to think she's nothing much, to bring Jesus into the world.

God chooses us as well, to bring Jesus's love into the world again and again and again. You're not nothing much, because you matter to God. You have a purpose. You have a reason to be here. And it's the same reason Mary had, because God is coming here through you.

The most difficult days of Mary's life were still ahead of her. We still have difficult days ahead. There's no way to tell, or really even any way to measure, how difficult. But difficult days and difficult feelings and difficult thoughts never ever mean that you're nothing much. Because God loves you and is coming here through you. God's love was made human in Jesus, and God's love is also made visible in the way we love our neighbor as ourselves.