

You Never Know When God Might Appear (Advent 1)

Luke 1:5-20

November 29, 2020

First Presbyterian Church, Luling

First, I need to fill you in on the plan for sermons during Advent this year. About five years ago, I ran across this song and video called “Hey, Mary.” It was written by a man in New Zealand named Malcolm Gordon, and his son Sam. Baby Lucy also is referenced in the song. I’ve wanted to figure out a way to share it with you ever since, and this is the year it’s going to work, thanks to technology we did not expect to be using. I’m going to play the video for you in a minute, but let me describe it first to those who are just on the phone. It’s Sam, the little boy, playing with a toy nativity set. He has the angel and Mary talk to each other, and gradually other characters come into the scene. By the end, they’re all gathered around the manger, where a crane gently drops Baby Jesus. I’ve picked out several phrases from the song to use to focus our sermons for the four Sundays of Advent. I’m going to play the song first, and then we’ll talk about the phrases.

~play song~

It’s a simple song, with a simple structure, but a deep meaning. I chose as kind of the theme for the whole Advent season, “No such thing as ordinary now,” because to me that’s the good news of Christmas, of the incarnation: that no matter what we think of as ordinary or dreary or monotonous—and goodness knows, we’ve had some of those kind of days and weeks and months in this pandemic season—no matter what we think of as ordinary, it really isn’t. It isn’t ordinary, because God in Jesus Christ has entered into this ordinary reality and made it extraordinary by his very presence. So that’s the overarching theme.

So that is the chorus: “There is no such thing as ordinary now. God is here. Every life and breath is blessed; you never know when God might appear.”

Today’s sermon theme, then, is “you never know when God might appear,” and we read two Scripture passages that illustrate that, though there’s a bunch more that fit that theme as well. First, Moses at the burning bush. Moses is minding his own business, tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro. He’s out in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the desert, with just the sheep, and he sees what he thinks is an ordinary bush, suddenly on fire but not being consumed by the fire. There’s no such thing as ordinary now, not even an ordinary bush, because Moses just doesn’t know when God might appear. And God speaks to

him out of the now extraordinary bush and calls him to be the deliverer of God's people.

And likewise, Zechariah is going about his business, the business of a priest. He wasn't any more holy or qualified than any other members of the priestly line. He's just an ordinary priest. Granted, he has been chosen to be the priest who entered the inner portion of the Temple make an offering. But it wasn't a reward for especially priestly or holy behavior. They rotated this duty, or privilege, among different groups of priests, and Zechariah had been chosen by lot, meaning by luck or chance. An ordinary priest chosen for what would become not-an-ordinary turn alone in the Temple.

It was about to become a not ordinary turn in the Temple, because, well, you never know when God might appear. And God does appear in the Temple, in the form of an angel, right there in front of Zechariah.

It seems safe to say that Zechariah is, at the very least, astonished. Probably afraid. The angel tells him that, after long years of no children, his wife Elizabeth will have a baby, what seems an ordinary event, until it's your baby, your baby that has come after years of disappointment and giving up hope altogether. This then, is extraordinary news to Zechariah. The further news of who their baby will grow up to be, that he will prepare the way of the Messiah, is even more astounding to Zechariah. The sign that he requests appears in that he is struck silent, unable to speak, until the baby is born.

You never know when God might appear. Both Moses and Zechariah are at work, essentially, doing their everyday work when God appears. Zechariah is having a bit of a special day there in the inner Temple, but it's very much one of the things in his job description. God might just appear in the midst of our everyday work, whatever that work might be.

We could even draw the conclusion that when God appears to you right in the middle of your shift at work, it indicates—at least it does for Moses and Zechariah—that God is going to call you to do something big, to tell you that there's nothing ordinary about your life, that in fact there's no such thing as ordinary now. Because God has appeared, just when we least expect it, in places and ways that we wouldn't have thought of.

Advent is full of messages. But one message of Advent is this: be on the lookout! Be expectant! Keep your eyes open, your window blinds open, your mind open. You never know when God might appear.