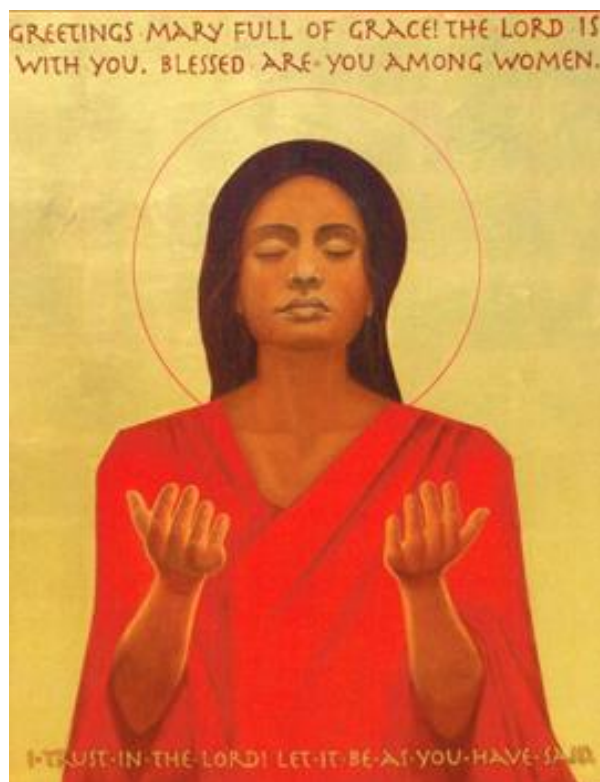


The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 1:26-38
 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16
 Psalm 89:1-4,19-26
 Romans 16:25-27

December 20, 2020
 The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Here we are...at the 4th Sunday in Advent. The Sunday where our focus turns to love. I want to open my sermon this morning with a simple image of Mary. I say simple only in the fact that in this particular icon, Mary stands alone. Hands open, eyes closed, in a beautiful gesture of praise.



When you look at her, what do you see? ¹

I see strength. Confidence. Faithfulness. Courage. Those are my first impressions. But as I look deeper I begin to see something else...a willing heart, a delight in God, a commitment to stand before God saying “Yes, Lord.”

As you keep looking you realize that this simple image is actually quite complex. There’s much to teach us in her simple, quiet gesture. Her delight in standing before God is a testament to the love that inhabits this space. The love between God and this one individual, willing to say

¹ *The Annunciation by Laura Fisher Smith*

yes, Lord. Here I am. As you look, you can almost feel that love filling this space and leaning into creation, not letting go.

But, I also notice another important detail about this image. We only see Mary from the waist up. It's true...her serenity and strength are palpable but what might be happening if we saw her entire image?

I know if it were any one of us, we might see children clinging to our legs, faces smudged with peanut butter, crying because they didn't take a nap. We might see toys scattered on the floor. A dog curled up at our feet. Dirty dishes in the sink. Laundry to be folded. Emails piling up. Deadlines to meet.

As much as I love the peace that this image provides, I am actually more drawn to the clutter we don't see. Here is the lesson (at least for me). It's the offering we make of ourselves in the midst of our messy, busy, complicated lives. The prayers we send up when we are tired. The blessings we need when we are at our limit. Sure...we long to look like Mary...hands up, eyes shut, shoulders back...ready to receive peace. But how can we even lift our hands when our hands are too busy taking on all of the demands around us?

Let's be honest...wouldn't you love to see a mess at Mary's feet?

It's like when a neighbor comes over and you haven't vacuumed or cleaned the bathroom, the dogs are barking, and the kids are screaming. It's not how we want the world to see us. We would rather have only the top half visible (The Zoom version)...the half of ourselves that's all put together, at ease, with a freshly pressed shirt and combed hair.

Yet, that's the thing. God sees the mess and calls us forth anyway. God sees we are tired and renews us. God sees that we are stressed and eases our worry. God sees that we are lonely and sits quietly with us.

We hear the words...The Lord is with you.

And, then we pause. Like Mary. How can this be? Just look around, God...this isn't a holy place...I haven't cleaned up. I haven't even gotten out of my pajamas much less finished the to-do list that is growing by the day. Surely, there is someone more suitable...maybe they actually pray and read their Bible. Aren't those the kind of people you want, the churchy ones, the ones who know all of the words to the hymns? I haven't taken the time to pray in a long time. God, I didn't think you would notice me.

In our story, at that moment of confusion, Gabriel simply stands there as Mary looks around. He waits. I imagine Mary taking in the life around her....just as it is. The messiness at her feet, the chores of the day, the regular life she is living.

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

But how can this be? I am just...me.

But, Mary, you have found favor with God.

In my mind, in the moment, Gabriel smiles a gentle, kind smile. He likes the messiness around her, the reality of life, the gift of living.

His smile to me says, Mary, this is holiness. In that moment, I can see the image of the icon coming to life. Mary, standing up a little bit straighter, letting go of her worry. Exhaling. Squaring her shoulders. Closing her eyes. Realizing she is the one whom God loves. Just as she is. And, so, she lifts her hands in strength and confidence. In Faithfulness and in courage.

Here am I, the servant of the Lord.

Those words are so incredibly beautiful. The holiness of the moment in the midst of life as we live it. Just as we are. Putting our whole life in God's hands. Believing there is value and purpose in all that we are. Letting grace settle in. Here I am, Lord. Here I am.

And then we step on a Lego and pray. Thank you for my life, God. Thank you for the messiness. Thank you for loving me. Here I am, a servant of the Lord.

Amen.