

Year C, 4 Advent

December 23, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Some people do grand and great things every day of their lives. And then there are the rest of us. I recall one of those times in my life when I had the realization, I will probably not live an extraordinary life. I was working as a computer programmer and Kate was doing some bookkeeping for her boss. I had spent the day working on a program that would not run...it kept crashing with an error...and so I literally spent hours scanning, searching through my program – hundreds of lines long – looking for an error. And if you know anything about programming, you know what this feels like. I finally discovered I had made a foolish, beginner’s mistake of omitting a single semi-colon at the end of one line in my program. I put in the semi-colon and, *voila!* It worked perfectly. Kate, on the other hand that same day, was trying to balance her boss’ accounts, and found she was off by less than a dollar and so spent a considerable amount of time tracking down the missing funds. And so when we got home, we were both quite excited to report on how our day went. “I was off by a penny, but I finally found it,” Kate proudly proclaimed. “I spent hours and finally found a missing semicolon!” I boasted. And that was when the realization hit me that we lived very ordinary lives.

But it’s OK. Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings are full of ordinariness...of people like you and me, and of places kind of like Annandale. Our reading from the prophet Micah begins with “You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah...”¹ Micah doesn’t proclaim the greatness of Judah’s capital, Jerusalem...no, he’s talking about Bethlehem – a sleepy little village. And our Gospel reading is all about two simple peasant

¹ Micah 5.2

women: young Mary and her older cousin, Elizabeth. There is nothing special about them; the world did not revolve around them, nothing great and grand was expected of them. I doubt they were known outside their tiny villages.

Little Bethlehem...young Mary...cousin Elizabeth. Nothing special. Ordinary.

Nothing special, until God touched them. "...you, O Bethlehem... from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel... [and that ruler] shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God." That's not ordinary!

Elizabeth...visited by the Archangel Gabriel...is told she would give birth to one "great in the sight of the Lord...even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit...he will turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, [he will] make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Of course, this is John the Baptist...the cousin of Jesus.

And Mary...also visited by the Archangel Gabriel...is told she will give birth to a King...and of his kingdom there will be no end. And we ***know*** who that is.

Humble, ordinary places...humble, ordinary people...touched by God...filled with the Holy Spirit to become extraordinary, life changing people and places. Out of a nothing, small town in backwoods Israel...Bethlehem...comes a ruler...a leader...our Lord and Savior. Out of the willingness to say 'yes' to God's call two simple peasant women became prophets...and became mothers who would love, cherish and nurture great men – a spiritual leader...and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes God reaches out and calls the humble to do great things...but not always. More often God reaches out and calls the humble to do humble work. God touches plain folk like you and me...filling us with the Holy Spirit...filling us with passion and drive, strength and

courage...working *through* us to do great things and working *through us* to do humble work – all of God’s work is important and vital.

I’ve said this before, but it bears repeating – advice given to me years ago: you cannot change the world, but you can change *your* little corner of the world. When the Holy Spirit enters our hearts we are stirred into action and with God’s grace we can do great things for our community...for our neighbors...for those around us...for the stranger. Great things that come in simple packages: being a sympathetic ear; providing a meal; wrapping gifts for a fund raiser; checking in on a neighbor; giving a heartfelt, sincere welcome to a newcomer here at church.

I wonder sometimes if Elizabeth didn’t think, “I can’t...I’m too old.” Or Mary, perhaps she thought, just for a moment... “I can’t, I’m not old enough.” Our response to the movement of the Spirit should never be *I can’t... I don’t know how... I don’t have enough...I’m afraid...* The Good News is with God’s help, *we can...we will...God will provide enough...we have no reason to be afraid.*

Please know that I support you 100% in your response to God’s call. Your clergy – Deacon Theresa and Fr. Paul...support you 100% in your response to God’s call. So, what are you feeling called to? How has the Holy Spirit been nagging you? Pay attention...listen. And like young, ordinary Mary, your response... *our* response... to God’s call should be “yes.”

AMEN

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam