

## Just Say Yes February 17, 2008

Ten years or more ago, we did a service here about Abraham that was entitled, “You Want Me to Do What?!!!” I was really tempted to repeat that title for today’s message, because we have a Bible story that has some similarities to that of Abraham.

Now, if you are not familiar with the story of Abraham, allow me to offer a brief summary. Abraham and his wife Sarah are a childless couple who are becoming quite old. They have lived for quite some time in their same environs, and everything is going along as well as could be expected. Then, out of the blue, Abraham hears a word from God, saying “**Leave your country, your relatives and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you.**”

Now, if I had been either Abraham or Sarah, I probably would have thought I was losing my mind, and probably grumble something like, “What a crazy idea! After all, I’ve put down roots here; things are going well. Why on earth would I need to leave, and especially when travel is so difficult at my advanced age?” But that isn’t the way Abraham responded. Instead, he did just what God asked him to do—he left with his wife, nephew, all his livestock as well as all those people who were part of his household. He packed up everything and began moving to a new place—all because of God.

Now, if that wasn’t crazy enough, something else extraordinary happened. God also informed Abraham that he, a childless man, was going to be the father of a great nation, and that he and Sarah would, even at their advanced age, become parents! Sarah laughed when she heard the news, and I’m sure Abraham was filled with some disbelief. Nonetheless, as God’s promise came true, they began to understand that God can work in many unexpected ways.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is like the story of Mary when she experienced a word from God in the form of an angel named Gabriel. The word was that this young, unmarried girl would give birth, and that the child was to be named Jesus. All this news was delivered in the context that this was a blessing from God, that God had looked on her with favor.

This is where I would have expected Mary to utter those words, “You want me to do what? Give birth to a child? Don’t you know I’m not married? What a scandal it would be if I got pregnant!” That’s what I would have expected, but that isn’t what happened. Mary, like Abraham before her, just said “yes” to God. There’s no evidence of questioning, refusing, complaining or anything else—they both just said “yes.”

Our Bible passage this morning retells a little of Mary’s story. It is her song of praise for God, often referred to as the “Magnificat.” Here’s how our verses go:

**My heart praises the Lord; my soul is glad because of God my Savior, because God has remember me, a lowly servant! From now on all people will call me happy,**

**Because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me...God kept the promise made to our ancestors, And came to the help of the servant Israel; God remembered to show mercy to Abraham and to all his descendants forever!”**

Mary’s song of praise shows her trust in God, because she knows that God has kept the promise made to Abraham, and to all of Abraham’s descendants. She is truly praising God because of God’s constant presence and loving goodness.

So what is the message for us? What do the stories of both Abraham and Mary have to do with us? I think the simplest way to put the primary message I take from these stories is this: **God can and does work through ordinary people in some extraordinary ways if we are willing to allow God in.** However, it’s only if we listen to God, look for God and are willing to trust God, only if we’re willing to say “yes,” that God can accomplish that good work in and through us.

Therein lies the problem, I fear. I wonder how many of us really allow openings in our lives for God to get in. It seems to me that all too many of us spend a lot of our time just being busy. We have our homes to care for, our jobs to do, traffic to fight, kids to manage, bills to pay, cars to repair, and all the hum-drum details that are required just to function in this life. Many of us have trouble getting it all done, and as a result, feel pretty overloaded. How can God get in when that’s the way our lives are?

Then I think there’s another problem we get into when it comes to letting God in, and that has to do with our preconceived notions of how God works. Take prayer, for instance. Some of us may not believe that God hears or responds to our prayers because we don’t wind up getting exactly what we ask for. We are so close-minded about what we expect of God that we limit what we perceive God is doing. It’s not that God isn’t working; it’s that we can’t see it because it doesn’t fit with our plans or our expectations or desires.

I’m convinced that most of us will not have burning bush experiences as Moses did, or thunderbolts filled with God’s voice coming from the heavens. Yet I really believe God is always there, waiting for us to open our hearts and minds and spirits as we allow God be God. God comes to us in the simple things, in the quiet spaces, in the ordinary circumstances of life.

The Garden’s vision is that we will experience God wherever we are. What we mean by that is that we can and will open our eyes enough to see where God’s loving goodness is present—even in those unexpected places. We often think that we can experience God in nature by listening to the birds sing, and by watching the wind in the trees.

However, how often do we expect God on the drive to work, or while sitting in a meeting, or when cleaning the bathtub? I believe God is just as present then; it’s a matter of our being willing to open ourselves to experience that love and goodness wherever we happen to be and in whatever we happen to be doing?

Going right along with that openness is the necessity to let go of our rigid expectations of what it means for God to hear us and be active in our lives. It seems to me that it works better if we are willing to loosen our grip on our set plans, and allow God to come in with some surprises. I really believe God is a God of the unexpected. If we are willing to look for the unexpected, we may be very blessed with what we discover.

And then there's one more dimension to making it possible for God's love to be at work in and through each of us: realizing that God's needs us. It was God working through Abraham that newness came to be; it was God working through Moses that the people of Israel found courage; it was Jesus trusting the disciples that the good news of God's love spread. God needs us to just say yes, and to be open and willing to go wherever God leads. I agree with Mother Theresa who once said that we are pencils in the hand of God. Yes, we are the ones through whom God continues to work to make this world come alive in new and vital ways. In order for us to be pencils in God's hand, we have to be willing to trust and to follow.

Sue Monk-Kidd talks about a young woman named Kathy who had completed a rock climbing course. She said that the hardest part was the blindfolded climb. I don't know about you, but I can hardly imagine climbing a steep precipice at all, let alone blindfolded! Kathy described the experience this way: "I was up on the rock face unable to see a thing, not knowing which direction to move. A guide below was calling directions to me like, 'Move your hand a few inches to the left and you'll find a crevice.' In the beginning I was so afraid I couldn't focus on what he was saying. It finally hit me that the only way I was going to make it down was to concentrate on his voice and follow his directions, step by step."

**"Concentrate on his voice and follow his directions, step by step..."** Good advice when it comes to rock climbing, and good advice when it comes to being able to say "yes" to God. A key is listening for God's voice, even in some unexpected places and in some surprising ways, and to follow, even not knowing what will come next. When we follow God's lead, step by step, I can assure you that we'll be OK, because God always, always keeps a promise, and will never let us fall.

Martha Lupton once said, **"If God is your partner, make your plans large."** I'm convinced that with Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, God wanted to be partners, and look what happened! God wants to be partners with us, to work in and through us. I say, "Let's let it happen, and make our plans large!"