



Sunday, Dec. 16, 2018

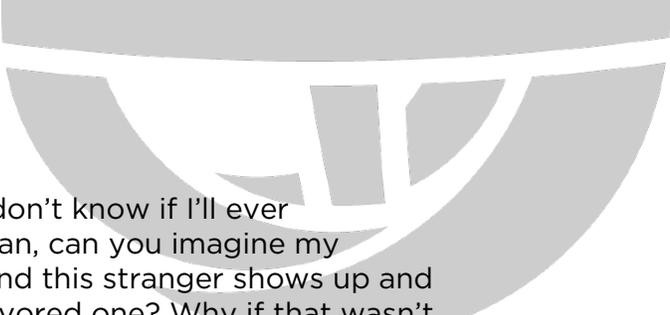
God is With Us When Life Doesn't Go as Planned
Pastor Lisa Kipp

Luke 1:26-38 NRSV

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

How could this be? That's all I could think to say. *How could this be?* I'm just a poor, young peasant girl. Why I've never been anyone special. I've always just blended in with everyone else. I do what's expected of me. I fear God. I love my family. But everything – everything – has changed this year.

Months ago it seemed like life was going to work out just as I had always dreamed; just as I had always hoped. You see, I met a man named Joseph. He showed interest in me. It seems he had dreams, too – dreams of getting married, having a family, working as a carpenter as we made our way in the world together. I knew it would be nearly a year until we were married, but it felt like the pieces of my life were starting to fit together.



And then that angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth. I don't know if I'll ever understand why Gabriel – why God – chose me. I mean, can you imagine my surprise when I'm going along with my normal day and this stranger shows up and doesn't just greet me, but calls me "favored one." Favored one? Why if that wasn't enough to leave me perplexed, you can imagine how I felt when he told me that I was going to have a son. *How could this be?* I asked him. I am so young and still a virgin.

And then the angel explained everything – how the Holy Spirit would come to me; how this child in my womb would be called the Son of God. The thoughts in my mind were running rampant. Oh there are plenty of responses that I considered: *Me? I think you've got the wrong girl.*

Or, Why this must be a joke. Who put you up to this?

But what I really wanted to say was: *No thanks, I have other plans.*

But something stirred in my heart in that moment, too, because I know God. And I know that God shows mercy to those who fear him, that God cares for the lonely and the scared like me, that God never leaves us – the poor, the outsiders, the lost. And then it was those final words of the angel that wouldn't leave me – *Nothing will be impossible with God.*

I wanted to respond with fear and disbelief. But I couldn't. Because I know God, and even though this wasn't how I saw my life working out, I chose to trust those angel's words. I took a deep breath, and with as much confidence I could muster I told the angel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Gabriel left, and I wasn't exactly sure what to do next, but I trusted my cousin Elizabeth would know, for she was older and wiser than me. And a part of me wanted to see for myself if the angel's words were really true. After all these years, could she really be expecting a baby herself?

The journey wasn't easy to get to her home in the Judean hills. It took me three days and there were so many obstacles. The road was hard, but God was with me. And then I could hardly believe what I saw when Elizabeth stood at the door to welcome me. Something changed when she saw me. Her little baby leapt for joy in her belly, and she spoke words that confirmed what the angel had told me. I am going to be the mother of our Lord. Something holy is going to happen. Finally, there was nothing more I could do than give thanks to God.

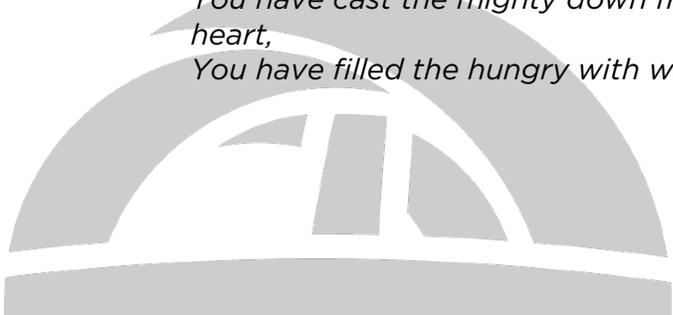
*My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you,
You have looked with love on your servant here, and blessed me all my life
through.*

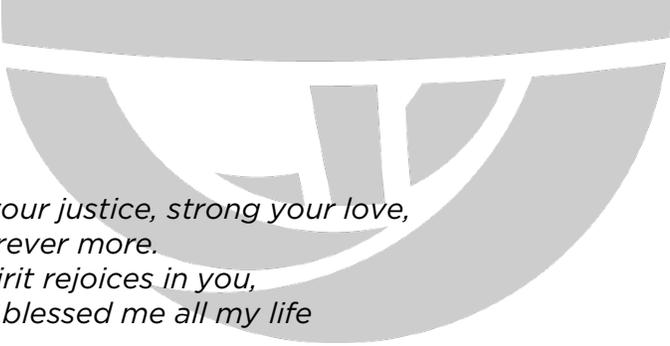
Great and mighty are you, O Holy One, strong is your kindness evermore.

How you favor the weak and lowly one, humbling the proud of heart.

*You have cast the mighty down from their thrones, and uplifted the humble of
heart,*

You have filled the hungry with wondrous things, and left the wealthy no part.





*Great and mighty are you, O Faithful One, strong is your justice, strong your love,
As you promised to Sarah and Abraham, kindness forever more.
My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you,
You have looked with love on your servant here, and blessed me all my life
through.*

My time with Elizabeth is almost done now. I've been here for nearly 3 months. We talked about so much - about our hopes and our dreams, and our fears, too. We know that life is going to be different for both of us; different in a way neither of us ever anticipated.

I suppose we all have hopes and dreams, whether or not that's what we call them. We dream for a long and happy marriage, children who grow up to love us and serve our God. We hope for daily work that is meaningful and provides us with enough to care for our loved ones. We want to live long and healthy lives. I suppose maybe sometimes life works out just like that, but if I have to be honest, I've never seen life unfold in quite the way we plan it to happen. In fact, I suppose maybe at some point in your life you've taken a look around and wondered like me, *How could this be?*

But you see, that is precisely the time when God is with us. When God speaks to us through a stranger, or shows up in the compassion of a dear friend like Elizabeth, or guides us on a long journey, or appears in the faithfulness of someone like my Joseph.

So next time that God intervenes in your life, or things don't work out quite as you planned them to be, remember that God won't leave you alone to make your way through. Even when life seems impossible to us, our God is a God of possibilities.

