

Isaiah 61 and Luke 1:46b-55

St. Andrew Lutheran, Beaverton

Being a parent is never easy. Did you ever see a cartoon that was captioned: It sure wasn't easy, being the mother of Jesus. It showed Mary holding a hand-written note: "Dear Mom, Gone into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. Don't worry! Xo, J"

When I gave birth to my first son, someone gave me a card that said, "To become a parent means to forever carry your heart outside your body." I think that's really true whenever we love and care deeply. Whenever we say yes to love, we make ourselves blessedly vulnerable. Today, and during this season, who or what needs a "yes" from you? How might your "yes" change things beyond you? Our saying "yes" can bring about radical transformation.

The passage from Luke we know as the Magnificat, Mary's song. This is a story of God's calling to Mary, and Mary's "yes." She sings a bold, prophetic song of the reversal of social order. She receives her blessing in becoming mother of the Savior. She is all in!

At some point in our lives, most of us encounter a situation that seems to reverse the order of things. It shakes us up: debilitating health issue, the death of a loved one, an unexpected ending of a relationship or divorce, a wayward child, a job loss, an unforeseen tragedy... Even just the normal process of aging thrusts upon us all loss after loss, making some things that once were easy, now difficult. What life sends can be perplexing. But Mary models a feisty "yes." Her assent accepts the reality of the situation – and opens her to radical change.

Some years ago, a friend of mine had a tragedy befall his family. His son was convicted of a crime, put into federal prison, and separated from his family, including his toddler son, for many years. This conviction was bewildering to my friend. I was brand new parent myself, and I could see how the weight of this situation affected him every single day. He would say to me, "Pastor Laurie, we just have to keep believing that he will get out, and he will still be whole. There is no other answer." I thought: How does this father live with this suffering?

His feisty "yes" was to continue to love his son in every way he could. He enlisted others like me to write the judge on the case. And then we wrote encouraging letters to his son. When he was able, he spent time with his grandson. He prayed consistently for his son, and visited him prison as he was able. There really was no other choice but to show his love and support in all the ways possible. Of course, that choice transformed the rest of his life, and the lives of his son and grandson.

Over the past three and a half years, all of us have adjusted ourselves to the impacts of COVID-19 and the disruption of our communities and lives. In that context of upheaval, perhaps today's scripture points to good news potential transformation when trust God, and open ourselves to the new. A step in that direction is prayer for seeing with clarity, and seeing what's real, and turning to God with a radically open hearts.

Mary assented to an unexpected situation that changed the course of her life. But not just her life. Her “yes” changed the people of Galilee and Jerusalem. In mothering Jesus, she helped to make radical change. In her “yes” she made a space for God to work in the world in a new way. Her “yes” brought about new life that continues to impact the world over two-thousand years later.

What might you say “yes” to – that brings new life?

A clergy friend of mine has a young adult daughter named Molly Grace. Molly is a very talented and lovely soprano soloist and music teacher. She was first diagnosed with breast cancer at age 29. I’ve not met her in person, but I feel that I know her because of a project she began when first receiving chemotherapy. She couldn’t NOT have cancer, but she found a way to bring her positive spirit to the journey. In order to cope, she launched a YouTube channel, *The Unsinkable Molly Grace*, where she posts campy videos of herself, costumed and lip syncing to showtunes and theme songs, all filmed during her chemo treatments. She has performed songs from the iconic bald Daddy Warbucks from *Annie*, to Timon singing *Hakuna Matata*, to Maurice Chevalier singing *Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries*, to *Beautiful* by Carol King, and dressed as Harry Potter in *High, High, Hopes*. Her mission is to share her journey in a way that educates and uplifts others. During her cancer journey, she dated, met and married the love of her life, and continues to teach and sing.

Molly says “You lose so much control when you are a patient. You lose control over your schedule, your body, your finances... The things you can control become very important to you.” Molly jokes that she has emotional attention deficit disorder and that feeling scared or worried for too long would be boring. Instead, she organizes costumes, plans her props, and memorizes showtunes before trekking to her appointments, ready to perform—each video she makes more spirited than the last. She wears bright, red lipstick. With vibrant presence she sings, and makes clear: Here I am (still) and I’m saying “yes” to life!

Because of Mary’s yes—we are invited to say “yes” and to open hearts today.

Perhaps you are considering a “yes” to a situation or person that makes you afraid. Maybe there is something difficult to accept that you are not sure how to approach with compassion. As we contemplate Mary’s “yes,” I’m closing with a favorite poem by Madeleine L’Engle.

After Annunciation

This is the irrational season
when love blooms bright and wild.
Had Mary been filled with reason
there’d have been no room for the child.