

I invite you now into a short meditation. Get comfortable. Close your eyes if you wish.

Imagine you have a few hours for an organizing project. You are tidying up a workspace whether it is for your work or a hobby. If you live with other people, they are out for a few hours or engaged with other activities. Imagine you have this time for you and the work you have decided to do. You are glad for this time – to put things away so that the next time you come to this space everything will be ready. You are completely engaged in your work perhaps not even hearing music you have put on. And then you see a strange warm glow. ‘That’s weird.’ you think. You look up to see a person standing before you. You are afraid and yet you don’t run or call 911. Something tells you it is OK. The being says – Hello beloved of God. God is with you. Do not be afraid. God has seen your faithfulness and is pleased with you. And now God needs you. For awhile, there has been something on your heart that you cannot set down and now God is asking you to begin.

Then this strange being –an angel? – does indeed ask you to do a task or make a change that has been on your mind and you are shocked. How could they know? How could they understand this longing that has been with you? You have barely been able to put words to it yourself. “How can I?” you ask. Then you name some of the road blocks, fears or seeming impossibilities that have been in the way. And the being says – God will take care of this. Nothing will be impossible with God. Then you hear yourself saying, “Yes. I will.” And the being disappears and you look around your room, you wonder if any of it was real. And you wonder what will this now mean for you.

I gave this meditation in the hope of having you step into Mary’s shoes even just for a moment. We may not be called to bear the savior of the world, but God calls us. We may be called by God to start a project to engage the neighborhood kids who seem to only get into trouble. We might go back to school to pursue the job career we dreamed of. We take a new position in our company that will help us do more of what we long to do even if it means moving.

After almost 17 years of ordained ministry, I have seen how God has called people to some task or dream they never thought possible or barely imagined themselves doing.

I have heard words like:- The idea wouldn’t let me go. I felt I needed to do this. All of a sudden what I needed to make whatever it was work started to happen.

And then they volunteer to teach Sunday School, be on the vestry, start an outreach program or some other project. They start on a journey of following God’s call, but it is not an easy road. Even if our initial call is filled with great wonder and joy, often there come bumps in the roads – surprises.

Mark Bozzuti-Jones in his Advent reflection book, *In the Womb*, writes about this - Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Who knows if God will ask us to go to Nineveh like Jonah? Who knows if God will send us to Samaria as Peter and John were sent? Who knows if on the way to Bethlehem God will tell us to return to Nazareth? We do not like surprises. We want to know ahead of time. Yet God is so different from us. Everything in God is new, different, and surprising all the time.

Our gospel story today sets Mary on a journey of surprises, of ups and downs, big bumps in the road, sharp turns, scary times and heartbreak. We too are on this journey of God calling us. We too are on this often strange journey which comes with following Christ. How do we travel this way? How was it possible for Mary?

The Rev. Kate Moorhead ¹ had wonderful insight on this. She writes, "It is often the smallest acts of surrender, when we give up control rather than try to take it, that we allow God to enter the world in the most powerful ways. Mary did not try to seize power. She was not hungry for fame or acknowledgement. She just agreed to let herself become an instrument of something more than herself. She stepped aside so God could step in. ... Sometimes the most holy thing that we can do is to step aside so that God can show us what to do.

Sometimes the most sacred act is to accept the things we cannot change, for it gives God the space to step into the vortex and act. God's solutions to the human predicament are so wildly, so profoundly more elegant, healing and fantastic than anything that we could come up with. Mary knew this."

Mary stepping aside led to the birth of the savior of the world. Can we too get out of the way and step aside? Can we trust in God's solution? Can we do it whether it is a call from God or just navigation what life throws at us?

This week I've walked with two families through some difficult times when all that was left to do was pray. There was no other action to take, and no more calls that could be made. All that could be done was to step aside, pray and leave it in God's hands. Neither family knows how this particular part of their journeys will work out, but they are doing their best to set God squarely in the center of their journey. This is the gift Mary gave us as we all set out on our journey of God's call to us.

Let us step aside, get out of the way and see what God has prepared for us.

¹ <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5f95a26615fb6593000015/kate-moorehead-stepping-aside>