

December 20, 2020
Fourth Sunday in Advent

“Give Yourself to Love”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The 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[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then 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.

SERMON: “Give Yourself to Love”

In the first couple of chapters in Luke we see a lot of what scholars called Angelophonies. Angels appear to Zechariah, To Mary, then to the Shepherds. In all these occurrences of angels the message has a similar pattern. First, the angels say something like “Sorry I freaked you out, just appearing out of no where like this way but please, don’t be afraid.”

Second, the angel says something like “God is about to do something spectacular. Are you willing to participate?” And thirdly, the humans, though sometimes with much fear and trepidation, willingly surrender themselves to God’s request, out of love for God.

Whether or not you believe in Angels or see this story as a metaphor the message is the same. We will be asked to give our lives, our very selves over to the love of God, to serve God’s mission of love in this world.

A defining moment or moments where we get to choose what path we are going to try and follow in our life. We are asked to choose between a spiritual path where we at least try to be the most loving people we can be versus a more human path where our own self interest and our own satisfaction is our guiding principle.

In our scripture Mary didn't hesitate, she says "Here I am" ready to serve. And seriously, that was a pretty big ask on the angel's part. But her complete self has totally surrendered to God. She chose the path of Love, as did Zack and the shepherds, but in all three cases it took an angel to lead them to the right path.

I was reading an article recently about how angels have fallen out of fashion here lately. Theologians don't talk about them much anymore. But for me, every time I have stepped off the path of love, there has been an angel to help guide me back to it. Maybe not like the angelophanies of the Bible but certainly good people, telling me, hey, don't be afraid, come this way, you will be amazed about what love can do.

I lost one of those people in my life last week. Not someone I was that close to, nor had I seen them but once in the last ten years but someone who was that angel who stood at a crossroads in my life and said "hey choose love" it's a much better life than the one your living.

She was one of those women that I just simply wanted to be like. A kind artist and musician. When you were around her you felt at home, at peace. She helped me find sobriety, and reclaim God, and when I was at my lowest she helped me find my love for music again.

You see way back in the eighties I did a lot of music, in some pretty rough bars, with country bands, always doing the loud music that people could dance to and never the music of my heart. When I hit my bottom, I had to give up the bars and the band because they were woven into my problems.

My friend Nancy invited me to play with her little folk group. In my jam sessions with them I found my voice again, and the poetry of my heart. I made harmony with people who just did it for the love of music, there wasn't a lead singer, there wasn't the egos of the bands, there was just the harmony and the music. It was so healing to my broken soul that was so full of bravado and bitterness. She heard the songs that I had written and encouraged me to write more.

And I did. Nineteen ninety two was probably the most prolific year for me in writing in all of my life. And with every song came more healing, more joy, and love for others, wanting to serve others, caring about the common good. It all took hold of me and blossomed, replacing self pity because angels like Nancy stood next to me saying, "Be not afraid, you can do this. God is going to do so much with your life, choose the way of love."

Do you have people like that? Angels that stood in your crossroads, gently saying, come on, this way is better? What have those moments been in your life where you had to choose the way of love over the way of self centeredness? What are those moments where someone guided you to a place of healing from a path of self destruction?

I also suspect that most of you have been that angel as well to others. Helping someone to choose love, choose God, to surrender their lives to loving others and being God's hands and feet. I bet you have said to someone "Be not afraid, it's going to be alright."

When I found out that my friend had passed away, almost immediately a song popped into my head and my heart that we used to sing together -- twenty nine years later. I hadn't given this song a thought but there it was tucked in with my memory of her. It fit so well with today's scripture about Mary giving herself over to love, I asked Julie to sing it with me this morning. Here it is "Give Yourself to Love" written by Kate Wolf.

Give Yourself to Love
Kate Wolf

*Kind friends all gathered 'round, there's something I would say:
That what brings us together here has blessed us all today.
Love has made a circle that holds us all inside.
Where strangers are as family, loneliness can't hide.
You must give yourself to love if love is what you're after;
Open up your hearts to the tears and laughter
And give yourself to love, give yourself to love.
I've walked these mountains in the rain and learned to love the wind;
I've been up before the sunrise to watch the day begin.
I've always knew I'd find you, though I never did know how;
Like sunshine on a cloudy day stand before me now.
So give yourself to love if love is what you're after;
Open up your hearts to the tears and laughter
And give yourself to love, give yourself...*

Link to the version by Peter, Paul, and Mary

<https://youtu.be/xTwFVAkXADU>

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