

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, December 8, 2019
Rev. Dr. David McKane

Saying Yes to God!

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16.

Psalms 72:1-8,18-19.

Luke 1: 26-38

Prayer. Holy and gracious One, in this season of Advent we wait, for the light to dispel the darkness, for the angels to proclaim your peace, for ourselves to awaken to your Word, incarnate among us. Come to us in word and song and presence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Have you ever sat with a cup of coffee or tea or perhaps even a nice glass of single malt or a glass of eggnog and counted your blessings? Thought back down the years of your life and given thanks for your health and your home, your family and your friends, your work and your hobbies, your Canadian citizenship, your faith, this place called London, Ontario, this place called New St. James? Have you ever done that? If not, then Advent is a good time to do so.

David did that. In our first lesson for today David kicks off his sandals and sits back, feet up, a nice glass of Israeli Merlot in his hand and thinks of all his blessings; his childhood in Bethlehem, that life changing encounter with the old prophet Samuel, his victory over Goliath, the defeat of the Philistines, the borders made safe, the peace in the land, the peace in his heart, a palace built, befitting his status, his cup full to overflowing and he thinks; God has been good, God has been gracious, God has been generous and God, god-dam-it, still lives in a tent. The Ark of the Covenant, the sign of God's presence among the people, is still residing in a tent.

So David decides to build God a house, a Temple fit for the living God, a house just as grand as his own, perhaps even grander, in which God can reside. And why not! That sounds reasonable, does it not? We like our gods to be as well off as we are, don't we. No Bedouin tent, no little wayside chapel, but something as grand as the Persians or the Egyptians or the Greeks, a palace fit for a king and God is surely greater than all the kings. David's got my vote, how about you?

There is just one problem, however, God does not want a house or a Temple. That would elevate God above the people, make him like Zeus on Olympus. That would

separate God from the people and this God whatever else we may think, this God prefers to reside among the people. So God tells David to forget it. God tells David that God will make a great nation of David, a royal dynasty no less but that God is quite happy where God is.

Well, you know the story. It is a very human story. The Temple gets built, the tent gets sent to Goodwill, God becomes separated from the people, from us, above us rather than among us, away from us rather than within us. We all do it. We all do it and then spend our lives searching for this God who searches for us like a parent searching for a lost child. We read countless books, attend seminars and retreats, practice yoga or Mindfulness Meditation, spend time at an Ashram or walk the Camino or travel to the world's holy places searching for this inner peace that passes all understanding, this still point, this soul centre, this pearl of great price against which all the world's wealth pales into insignificance. It is the story of humanity, a story as old as time itself and as new as the morning.

But wait, there is another story. A new perspective appears in Luke-Acts. God is at work from within, not from without. It is the story of Christmas, of new birth, of God becoming Emmanuel, God-with-us again, of Mary saying yes to God, of a child born in a manger and wrapped in the swaddling bands of love, of One who will become a Shepherd to his people and a Saviour to the world, One who teaches of an inner kingdom of God residing inside each one of us, child, woman, man, of a kingdom of peace and justice where lion and lamb can lie down together, of a heart overflowing with love and forgiveness, of lost souls found and lost sheep gathered in with great rejoicing, of goodness and mercy following after us all the days of our lives and as a final assurance Luke recalls the creed behind all creeds, the very words spoken generations before to Abraham and Sarah, the pioneers of this Judaeo-Christian-Muslim story, that with God all things are possible.

It is the story of Teresa of Avila's **The Interior Castle**, of Thomas Merton's **The Seven Story Mountain**, of Thomas a Kempis **The Imitation of Christ**, of Julian of Norwich's **Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love** to name but a few.

It is the angel's song of glory to God and peace on earth and it is our story, it is our story.

But that other story, the story of a distant God, of a God up there or out there is so dominant in our culture and within our egos that we even make this story separate from ourselves, something that only happened a long time ago and in a far distant land. It is a story so familiar to us that we forget how radical it was, we forget how radical it is. We forget that God still desires to reside among us and within us.

The fourteen candles on the Communion Table are in memory of the 14 women killed thirty years ago this past week at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique. And we continue to hear of so much these days about abuse against women, of honour killings of wives, sisters and daughters, of women treated as sex objects, of rape victims set on fire and killed in India, of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council stating that allowing women to drive would spell the end of their virginity, of young women who cannot walk in public unless a male member of the family accompanies them, of StatsCan Canada's report on sexual misconduct against women, released this past week and the statistic of 1 in 3, to say nothing of the Christian fundamentalists in the south of the United States that are legislating against a women's right to her own body. All this in the 21st century?

Over against that Luke has the audacity to have the angel Gabriel come to the young woman Mary without the permission or mediation of her father or of her husband or indeed of any male. She is free of patriarchal restraints and she says Yes to this God. God is doing a new thing here, an impossible thing in the eyes of many, a virginal thing in a patriarchal society. Remember what Paul, the converted male Pharisee, would later tell the Galatians, that in Christ there is neither male nor female, slave or free, Jew or Greek....for we are all one new creation in Jesus Christ? No glass ceilings there. This was and is radical good news turning patriarchy upside down. Even today we have trouble getting our heads around that never mind our hearts. Wasn't it just this past week that women gained parity in the sport of curling? Now what about hockey and soccer and tennis and skiing and so on? What about the other existing glass ceilings?

The world still waits for justice, for re-deeming, for the release of those captive to old ideas, for an end to patriarchy, for the eyes of the blind to be opened, for a godly presence, a Christ-like presence in our lives and this "hope," this "salvation," if you will resides not out there or up there but in here, in us, as with Mary we say Yes to God.

The message of Christmas is that such a God still resides among the people, that such a God can still be birthed in our hearts, that such a God can still be cradled in our lives, wrapped in the swaddling bands of human compassion. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, our bodies are the temple or tent of the Holy Spirit; that God resides not in some distant heaven but in us, in us.

Perhaps that is why the shepherds heard the angel's song, perhaps it is only when we are in the dark, under a night sky, what psychologists and spiritual counsellors call "the dark night of the soul" that we can hear or recognize the angelic voice within.

(sing) Will you come and see the light from the stable door?

It is shining newly bright, though it shone before

It will be your guiding star, it will show you who you are;

Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?

Will you step into the light that can free the slave?

It will stand for what is right, it will heal and save.

By the pyramids of greed there's a longing to be freed;

Will you hide, or decide to meet the light? (Voices United #96)

.....Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,

Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me? (#634)

Will you? Will you say Yes with Mary? Like a Greta Thunberg you could save the world!

Amen! And to God be the glory!