

Year B Advent 4 God Sees Past Our Mud Luke 1 verses 26-38

1st Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16. 2nd Reading: Romans 16:25-27

There is a wonderful story about a man who was home with his children one afternoon while his wife went out Christmas shopping. He was reclining on the couch, half sleeping, half watching a football game, when the kids came into the room.

"Dad, we have a play to put on" they said excitedly. "Do you want to see it?"

Well, he didn't really want to, but he didn't want to hurt their feelings, so he sat up, rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and became a one-man audience.

His four children - four, six, eight, and ten years old - were the actors: Joseph came in with a mop handle as his staff. Mary came in with a pillow under her pajamas so she'd have a big, pregnant belly; another child was an angel, flapping her arms as wings.

Finally the last child, the eight year old, came in, decked out in all of her mum's jewelry, her arms filled with three presents. She proudly announced, "I am all three wise men. I bring three precious gifts: gold, circumstance, and mud."

The father didn't laugh. The father didn't correct the wise man. The father reflected on those words that had somehow gotten into the Christmas story...into the very heart of the Christmas story: Gold, circumstance, and mud. God loves us for who we are, for our gold--where we are at our best; for our circumstances--where we are at

right now, and God loves us even for our mud—our frequent less-than-perfect moments when we are our most human.

God called Mary - an imperfect human with some spots of mud - to carry God within her, to bring him into the world to save us. God called and Mary said, "Yes."

That is the crucial piece in our story today...God called and Mary said, "Yes." God called. He didn't order. He didn't say to Mary, "This is the way it's going to be and you don't have a choice." God called.

I've been talking about Advent being a time of waiting - a time of us waiting for the physical arrival of Jesus once again when he will finish healing our world. But we're not the only ones who are waiting. God is waiting for us, too.

We belong to God. We have been baptized. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are part of the Church - Christ's body here on earth. And each part of the body has a job to do.

We belong to God. We belong to a God who loves us and who is waiting for us to love him. We belong to a God who whispers in our ear and waits for us to hear and to answer. We belong to a God who gently nudges us and waits for us to take action. We belong to a God who calls and waits.

John Dominic Crossan writes of the kingdom that John the Baptist proclaimed as about to arrive and the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed as here. Crossan tells us that, in Jesus' words:

"You have been waiting for God", Jesus says, "while God has been waiting for you. No wonder nothing is happening. You want God's intervention", he says, "but God wants your collaboration. God's

kingdom is here, but only insofar as you accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it...The Great Divine Clean-up will not happen without God but, neither will it happen without you. It is about a divine-and-human partnership and not about a divine-only intervention."

We sometimes have a hard time answering God's call to work in this partnership with him because we have a hard time believing that God would be calling us in the first place. We have a hard time seeing our gold because we are so very well aware of our earthly circumstances and our mud that marks us as imperfect humans.

The people in today's other readings are very well known biblical heroes but they certainly had some mud. Yet God called to them to further his purpose. King David was attracted to another man's wife - a man who fought in his army. David had that man sent into heavy fighting so that he'd be killed and David could have his wife. God didn't let David off the hook for doing this but God also saw in David a heart that was true to God alone - David worshiped God only - never idols, something that was difficult to do in that society and still is difficult today although our idols are of a different sort.

Paul became, arguably, the most famous Christian apostle, spreading the good news of Christ, enduring insults, whippings, hunger, and prison for Christ. Paul converted thousands and grew the church in staggering numbers. But, Paul had been called by God from a much different vocation. Paul had been an ardent persecutor of Christians. Paul stood by and watched as the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned to death. Paul zealously pursued the people who believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, and tried to exterminate this new sect of Judaism. David and Paul and many, many others throughout

Scripture are spattered with a whole lot of mud but God is able to see the gold beneath the dirt.

Then we have Mary. God called and Mary said, "Yes." Mary was well aware that she had some mud to offer to God - perhaps not as much as David or Paul but she was an imperfect, flawed human being just as the rest of us are. But God saw her gold. Mary knew she was in less than ideal circumstances - not yet being married - but God saw her gold. Mary knew this was her choice. God was waiting for her decision. God called and Mary said, "Yes". In trust and in hope, Mary stepped into the partnership.

In trust and in hope let us say "yes" to God. Let us push aside some of the busyness not only of this Christmas season but of our daily lives - let us push aside the busyness and feel for God's nudges. Let us push aside some of the constant noise and competing voices in our lives and listen for his still, small voice. God is calling to each and every one of us. Maybe you don't think of this as you prepare to read this sermon but, to be sitting here, is to answer a call from God. It is the Holy Spirit who brings the church into existence and urges it onwards toward the fulfillment of God's purpose. To be here, is to be called to be here. That call doesn't end with being here...

God chose an ordinary human being--Mary--to be the vessel through which the Son of God would be born. What is impossible for us is not impossible with God. God can - and does - take our gold, our circumstance, and our mud, and God does something glorious with it. God calls and God is waiting...