

Year B Advent 4 2023 Invitation to Disrupt Luke 1 vv26-38

God is a disrupter. We are told repeatedly throughout Scripture that God will make, and is making, all things new. To be made new necessarily involves change – the disruption of lives, of societies, of systems and institutions – and change is difficult. Even when the outcome is desired – who doesn't want the fullness of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven? – even when the outcome is desired, the change, the disruption required to get there is difficult. God is a disrupter and when Gabriel arrives on the scene, he is a figure at the site of a divine encounter intended to disrupt not only the everyday dealings of an individual, but to alter the circumstances of the whole people of God. Not only is Mary about to face great disruption, turning her life upside-down, the whole world is about to be turned on its head – God is coming to dwell among his people.

The very first thing God does when the status quo is about to be altered and the rhythms of the everyday about to be disrupted is to offer comforting words of assurance. "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you," Gabriel begins. "The Lord is with you." Pretty astounding news yet Mary is, rightly so, very greatly troubled by this sudden strange greeting. That is quite the pronouncement – the Lord is with you. There is even more disruption to come and so Gabriel follows up the initial greeting with more words of assurance: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God." Favoured one...found favour with God...Perhaps Mary is wondering why it is that she is favoured by God but, there is no time for such thoughts. Gabriel doesn't even pause before dropping the bombshell: "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son," he tells her, "And you will name him Jesus."

Become pregnant? Now hold on there...But Gabriel is joyfully continuing this astounding declaration with more amazing declarations: "He will be great, [this son of yours] and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." But there's more, Gabriel continues: "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Okay...whoa...back the truck up...Become pregnant? "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" she asks. It is a very sensible question. Again, God, through Gabriel, offers comfort: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." These are words indicating the closeness and gentleness of God. The experience will be as unobtrusive as a shadow falling across you when a cloud passes across the sun.

Well now, Mary may be young and she may be a virgin but, she's not stupid. This is no where near the version of the "birds and the bees" that she would have expected to hear. The look on her face must've still been highly skeptical. A virgin giving birth to the Son of God. Hmmm...

And so, amid all of these grand pronouncements of the great things to come, of the fabulously disruptive, turn-the-world-upside-down saving acts of our God, Gabriel finishes with one last pronouncement that ends all of Mary's skepticism: Your cousin, Elizabeth, has already experienced something similar, he tells her. Your older cousin, Elizabeth, of whom everyone said would never to be able to have children, is now pregnant. In fact, Gabriel says, she's already six months

pregnant. And with a knowing smile, he confidently concludes: “For nothing is impossible with God.”

Now we’re talking, Mary thinks... My cousin, Elizabeth, is expecting a child. We all thought she’d never be able to have kids – it wasn’t possible. Yes, yes, I know. This angel just told me nothing is impossible with God. And with a quiet but firm trust in God Mary speaks: “Here am I,” she declares, “The servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Why the sudden turn-around? Just a few moments ago she was greatly troubled and filled with doubt. “How can this be?” she had wondered. Now she was giving her whole-hearted assent to a radical change in her life, to an extreme disruption – one that would disgrace her family, disgrace her, and, nearly certainly get her stoned to death. Why would she agree to this? It’s not that she needed proof. Gabriel doesn’t tell her about Elizabeth’s pregnancy to prove to Mary that nothing is impossible with God. That wouldn’t get her to say, “Let it be with me according to your word.” Knowing that it was a sure thing that she would become pregnant, knowing it was a sure thing that her family would be disgraced and she would likely die a painful death, *that* wouldn’t get her to agree to it. She was young but she wasn’t crazy.

The news that Elizabeth was also pregnant wasn’t proof to convince Mary to agree to her role in God’s plan for salvation. The news of Elizabeth’s pregnancy provided Mary with a fellow journeyer. The angel made a series of grand pronouncements, one after the other in quick succession, pronouncements that would fill the people with excited hope and unbelievable joy: the long-awaited Messiah was coming, our rescuer was coming. But, for the young, vulnerable peasant girl

standing in awe and more than a little fear in front the angel Gabriel, this news was monumentally sobering – yes, the Messiah was coming but she – young, unmarried, frightened – she was to give birth to him. Sometimes God’s grand pronouncements, God’s amazing plan for our salvation needs a little something more: companionship.

And, can you believe it? This is the something more that God desires too. “God’s dream is to have total communion with creation, total intimacy with the work of his hand. This was God’s dream from the beginning, and we hear it captured in the story of creation. In the book of Genesis, God created, and after each day of creation, you can just about hear God clapping the divine hands and saying, ‘Good, good, good, good, good – my, oh my, how good it all is.’” Today we witness the moment “before God’s greatest dream came to fulfillment. Luke shows us today “the moment when a young girl was asked to bear God’s son. This is a story meant to evoke awe and wonder. God waited on a young girl to say, ‘Yes.’ Without Mary’s yes, God’s dream of communion with us would not have come about. Only with her response could there be Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary.” (p.19. 20 of *Lift Up Your Hearts Year B*)

God continuously invites us to be a part of his plan. He invites and waits for us to say “yes.” God desires our companionship, our love, and waits for us to turn to him so that he can lavish his love and companionship on us. Mary reminds us that God’s purpose is not simply to have multiple one-on-one relationships with all of the people on the planet. God’s purpose is for us to build relationship with God *and* with each other – to be companions on this journey toward wholeness. Companion comes from the Latin “com”, meaning “with” and “panis”, meaning “bread”. A companion is literally the person with whom you break bread, which

we will do together shortly. We are companions with each other and with God. Like Mary, we carry Christ within us for the world and, sometimes, what the world needs most, is companionship. “For people at the margins facing difficult situations, what matters most is someone who will share in their experience, stand with them, and walk with them.” That is what we witness today in Luke’s Gospel: Not simple assurances that God cares for us but the fact that God will *share* in our human experience and journey with us in our everyday lived contexts (adapted from writing of Raj Nadella on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)).

Mary said “yes,” to God’s invitation to which God must have replied, “Good, good, good, good, good, good.” Her consternation and doubt transformed into determined participation in God’s plan. Turning the world upside-down, disrupting the status quo – that she would shortly be joyfully singing about in what we call the Magnificat, The Song of Mary – had begun. A young peasant girl, with little social standing and no fortune was to carry the greatest treasure the world would ever know. The world’s greedy power of acquisition and competition was to be replaced with the humble, loving power of God. “Every man for himself” was to be eclipsed by “love your neighbour as yourself.” The reversals were in motion, lives were going to be disrupted...transformed...as victims of systemic inequality and injustice would be welcomed into God’s kingdom while the powerful of the world – the ones who don’t want, and don’t think they need God, would be left to their own devices, in the clamour and callousness of humanity’s kingdoms.

God keeps extending the invitation to enter into his kingdom, to live the newness being created. God is a disrupter, a change-maker, a turn-the-world-upside-down force in us and among us because God’s ways challenge the world’s values, challenges the world to be a place of true peace, of real, lasting joy, a place of life

and beauty. God's ways challenge us to go against the grain, to embrace qualities contrary to the power structures around us in order to help bring the newness, to be partners in the disruption, companions.

As companions, God challenges us to get to know him better. When we think we know what God wants and try to put ourselves in charge of the future, we may be surprised like King David was. When he decided he wanted to build a house for God, God said, "Ah, no thanks, I like the tent." God preferred the tent among the people, traveling with them. David did not expect that answer but God has always chosen to be in places we would least expect: making a temporary residence in a burning bush, in the sound of silence rather than the mighty wind, at work in the womb of a barren old woman or the virginal womb of a young unmarried woman in a backwater town far from the center of power. "God – untamed, uncontrollable, unsubjected, and unanswerable to whatever rules we might like to think God plays by" (p.23). But, at the same time that God makes it clear to David that God is the one acting to change the world, preparing the future that lies ahead, God tells David – and Mary, and us – that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves, bigger than our daily dealings and decisions and he calls us to be a part of that something bigger, a crucial part.

Will you bear the child in your body and bring him into the world? God asks. Will you bring the holiness of God into the world? Will you bring the love of God into the world? Will you bring the peace of God into the world? Will *you* will what *I* will? (p.23) Greetings, favoured ones! The Lord is with you. Let us say with Mary, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."