

Biblical Self-Confidence II: Don't Deny Yourself When God is Calling You

By Rev. Jonathan A. Malone

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Luke 1:26-38

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

4th Sunday of Advent

An area therapist, Dr. Stephen Treat, said in a presentation that people fall into two categories; either they think they are smart or they are stupid. He claims that almost every reaction can be found in one of those two perceptions. Last week we considered what it might feel like to be around those of claim they are smart, and like to live that way. Last week we considered how to keep ourselves humble and focused in the midst of religious bravado and chest thumping. But what about those of us who may feel inadequate? What about those of us who may feel less than up to the task? What about those of us who may worry that we are stupid?

I often wonder if Mary felt that way. Here she was, a young woman, engaged and preparing to finally go off on her own into the world. Here she was, standing on the brink between adolescence and adulthood, peering into the vast unknown of the next stage in her life. Here she was, possibly anxious about her change in life, her new adventures, and wondering if she was indeed up to the task.

First, can you find yourself sitting with Mary and worrying and wondering about the everyday, the normal, the usual anxieties, concerns and considerations? Can you find yourself sitting with Mary, worrying about your job, your home, your children, your school, your spouse, and your life? Maybe you have some big changes ahead of you. Maybe you have just undergone some major changes. Maybe you can find yourself with Mary in that normal place of anxious chaos and worry.

It is there that the word of God comes to Mary, and it is there that the word of God comes to us. We hear it through our friends, through our family. We hear it through sermons and devotionals. We hear it through scripture readings and through prayer meetings. We hear it through our time alone with our thoughts and with God. The word of God comes to us in a divine and mystical way as an angel descending from the heavens to bring the power of the word to our here and now in our lives. The word of God is that initial voice which is calling us to follow in Christ's footsteps. It is that holy and still small voice that calls us to be one of Christ's followers. Have you heard the word of God calling you and brining you the good news.

Maybe you have responded with perplexity, as did Mary. Maybe you responded with fear, or skepticism or doubt. Maybe you tried to brush aside the angel as if it were a fly or a gnat. Or maybe you find yourself with Mary wondering what it means to be called a "favored one." After all, what have we done to be favored? After all, who are we to be considered holy, chosen, or special? Perhaps Mary was looking at herself and thought of herself as just a young woman without any special class or clout in society. Who was she to be called a "favored one?"

When I was in seminary, I met a number of "second carrier" students who were training to go into the ministry. One of the things I admired about the second career student was the testimony. So many said that they had heard the call from God, but did not feel that they were good enough to go into the ordained ministry. Who were they to be considered "favored ones?" Here we find that second part of Dr. Treat's analysis – those of us who think we are stupid.

Be honest with your selves. Have you ever found yourselves called by God, and your response is, "well, I could never do that?" Have you ever heard the call and thought, "I'm not the right person for that?" This is what Mary did. She responded, "Who am I that God would choose me?" "I am not capable, I am not appropriate, and I cannot be the one that God wants to call, choose and use."

This is such a common response. We heard this response with Moses, with Abraham, and we

offer it ourselves. There are needs crying out to be met in our community and in our world, but we often say, let those mega churches meet the needs. They have the resources, they have the abilities, and they can do a much better job. Let the steroid Christians save the world – they can quote the verses, they can offer the spiritual knowledge, and they can do a much better job. In my messy, in my humble and meek state, what can I offer to the Lord, which the Lord can use? Who am I that God would call me to spread the word of salvation and righteousness? Who is this church that God would call us to be a light on the hill, when there are many other bigger and brighter lights on the hill? Here is where our self-confidence falters and falls. Here is where our feelings of inadequacy come to the fore. Here we find ourselves objecting with Mary on the prospect that God might actually be calling us.

But the messenger offers Mary assurance. The angel says to Mary that God will be with her and that the power of the Most High will surround her, and she will carry the one who is to be holy and is to be called the Son of God. God offers assurance to Mary, God offer hope to Mary and asks for faith. The angel points to her cousin, Elizabeth, who was beyond child-bearing years, who was barren all her life and who is now carrying a child through the grace of God. This is the assurance that Mary is given through the angel. It is the assurance that we are given as well. We will be surrounded by the Holy Spirit. We will be preceded by Christ, the Son of the Most High. We will have the examples of others before us to guide us and lead us. We are not too small, we are not too insignificant, we are not too slow, weak, or stupid, because we have been called and we have been blessed by God. Resources have limits, but God's power has none. Voices can shout only so loud, but the Holy Spirit will carry your voice farther. Words can only have so much effect, but with the Holy Spirit they will be written on the hearts of women and men. We can only do so much, be so much, and accomplish so much, but when we are doing the will of God, and we are led by God then we can do anything. A virgin carries a child, God becomes human, and the world itself is changed. Is anything, then beyond God's power?

The answer is no, and we are called to embrace that answer. So here is the crux of the message I am offering to you today; God is calling each and every one of you, and calls you to stand up, to stand tall and respond. It doesn't matter who you are, what your skills are, what your knowledge is, God is calling each of you. It may be to be a witness and a presence in your workplace, or to be a presence in your home, or at school. It may be to organize advocacy, or gather food, or collect clothing, God is calling each of you. God has a calling that is important and vital for his kingdom, God is calling you. So will you answer? Will you stand tall with Mary and say, let it be? Will you proclaim her *fait* as your own? You may have to take chances, you may have to take risks, but God is with you. Be confident; be sure of yourself, because God is with you. Mary said, "Yes" Mary bore the child, endured the labor, and then lived as a family on the run, as a mother watching her son suffer. But God was with her and God is with you. So stand up, and know that you are sufficient because of the grace of God.

AMEN