

Mary's "Yes", August 15, 2021, St. Timothy, Burnaby
Luke 1.46-55 (as Psalm); Galatians 4.4-7; Luke 2.1-7

Prayer

How fitting it is that a good series of readings about Kings Saul, and David, and Solomon is interrupted today. How suitable that there is an intrusion in the way we might expect things to go. We've found a bit of rhythm. We've come to expect something. We think we might know what is coming next.

And then, seemingly out of nowhere, everything shifts.

Today, we hear about Mary. Mary, the mother of Jesus.

That's the way the church calendar goes sometimes—but that's also kind of what happened to Mary.

Now, in all honesty, we really don't know a lot about Mary. There is far more speculation than there really is any solid evidence, even in the scriptures. And although theologians and different faith traditions will argue about the significance of how she was born, who she was, and what happened to her after she died (or didn't die since that is also an option), there can be absolutely *no doubt* that she was an immensely significant figure in Christian history. And probably all of human history.

Today various churches around the world celebrate the "assumption" of Mary, or the "dormition" of Mary, or even the "falling asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary." But since we talk about Mary so infrequently, I'm going to look at her importance in general, rather than merely focusing on what happened to her body after she died (or didn't die).

Just like our series of readings is interrupted today, so too Mary's life was interrupted. Let's assume, for a moment (although we have no evidence either way) that Mary was a pious, well-behaved, and otherwise typical young woman. *Her* plan would have been to marry a good man and raise children. Then suddenly, that plan was interrupted. She *would* raise a child—a very *good* child in fact. She would even get married. Just...not in the order that anyone in her culture would have accepted. Her plan was thrown for a loop.

What is celebrated most in the discussion of Mary is that *she said "yes"*. God wanted to use her to bring Godself into the world, and Mary said "yes". What is then translated for the rest of us, then, is that *we too* ought to say "yes" to God. Although I have yet to meet anyone who has had an angel of God visit them to ask them to do God a favour. Chances are that was a one-time thing.

So, it's hard to really imagine Mary's "yes" as the one take-away from her life that we can possibly learn from. And we are keen to have role models—especially *female* role models in the church, as women have been so marginalized throughout the ages (especially in the church) through the patriarchy. And venerating Mary to a special position might be one way of addressing the historic inequalities between men and women in the church. But I think we are often focussing on the wrong thing.

So much of the emphasis on Mary is on how she came to be the *theotokos*, or God-bearer. How would some woman be eligible to be the mother of God? There are lots of explanations that I don't need to elaborate on here, but much of the Church understands that Mary was *not* a typical woman at all. She was special, even from before her birth—and that is what *enabled* her to be the God-bearer—to carry the fetus of God-man in her womb.

Then, following the death and resurrection of her son, Jesus, attention often shifts to Mary's physical body as she aged and died. *Did* she die at all? Was she resurrected to a new life? How and when did she make her journey to heaven? And what form of her body went?

All of these discussions are ways for us to wrap our heads around this incredibly important person in human history. It is difficult to believe that Mary could possibly have been just a "normal" person, if she was selected for such an important task—and after she carried out that task.

But if that is where the story ends—if Mary got special treatment before and after her life on earth began and ended, that absolves *us* of any participation ourselves in God's work *through* us. Us "normal people" can't take on roles like Mary did—and we haven't been designated from before our birth to do incredibly important work for God.

...so...we're off the hook, right?

What I think is most significant about Mary and her life—and something we can learn from her example—is that *all* the important and really big work...is done...by *God*. This was all part of God's plan from before the ages—that God would send Godself as a human being to the world in order to redeem the world. This human would live a perfect life and die and then be raised to new life again, destroying death, and opening the path for all humanity to reconcile with and enjoy the presence of God for all eternity. *None of that* happens without Mary. She is central to that plan—though I'm sure God could have done something differently if necessary. But, as we have it, God's plan went right *through* Mary. She played a central role—but she played that central (and yet, *supporting* role) in God's plan. It was not her plan. It was not something that Mary brought about. There was nothing she could have done on her own, were it not God's plan to use her.

...but Mary said "yes". It wasn't only that she said "yes", though. Her "yes" allowed God's plan to completely alter her life. Her plans, her ideas, her visions and goals—they were all out the window. Her "yes" completely changed the trajectory of her life—and even put her in harm's way in her community. But she said "yes". And beyond that, she *celebrated* the way that God chose to use her in God's plan—we said together the words of her "Magnificat" earlier. She wasn't disappointed. She didn't grumble over the loss of her life-plan. She didn't try to hang on to some aspects of what she wanted to do while still fulfilling the bare-minimum of what God had asked her to do. She was all in. God's plan worked through her.

And that is what we can learn from St. Mary on this, her feast day. We too can learn to embrace distractions. Learn to celebrate the interruptions to *our* plan when God has something better in mind. We too can joyously celebrate the work that God is doing, even when it has come at a great inconvenience to us. We can relish *our* role in something bigger than ourselves, being glad that our discomfort will result in bringing God's plan to fruition.

May we all be so blessed as to be asked by God to put aside our own plans, visions, and goals so that God's work might be completed through us. And may we eagerly accept any opportunity to say "yes".