

God can use you—yes, even you!

Message for Sunday, December 23, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38; 47-55

Children's Message: from Luke 1:39-56

The Bible tells us that Mary, during the time when she was pregnant, went to live with her older relative Elizabeth for a few months. Elizabeth was also pregnant at the time. When Mary arrived, Elizabeth greeted her by saying how wonderful it is that God has blessed her, and also the baby inside her.

So what we need here are two pregnant women. Do we have any volunteers? Good! Here's a balloon for you, and one for you. Put them under your sweater so you look pregnant. Now, how do two pregnant people hug each other? I'd like to see you try that!

One of you is Mary, and you're going to be the mother of Jesus. Wow! That's pretty special. How does it feel to be his Mom?

And you're her relative, who encourages her. What can you say to her to help her?

Here's something interesting: Jesus promised that he would live inside *us*! Not that we're pregnant, but that his spirit lives in us.

John 15:4, New International Version:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Message: "God can use you—yes, even you!"

It all began with a simple peasant girl who lived in an unimportant town in an insignificant part of the world. She was engaged to be married to a local man, a carpenter. That's about all we know of either of them.

They were so poor that, when the time came for her baby to be born, they were unable to arrange for any better place than a stable for animals. When they brought their baby to the Temple to be dedicated, they sacrificed a pair of pigeons as an offering, because they could not afford the regular lamb offering [Luke 2:24; cf. Leviticus 12:2-8].

Thus begins the greatest story in the world. It doesn't sound like much, does it? Yet, from this humble home came the Son of God. It's a living parable of how God can use anyone, regardless of their social status, or education, or economic position, or whatever. A person may be insignificant in the eyes of others, but no one is little in God's eyes.

The only thing that matters is a heart and soul consecrated to God, ready for and willing to do whatever God has planned. That's the main point of my message today, so I'll say it again: *God can use anyone, regardless of who you are. The only thing that matters is to be consecrated to God, willing to do follow wherever God leads you.*

Let's pretend for a few moments that we are newspaper reporters. With our modern technology, we have the ability to go back in time, and be present when the events were happening. We have been given the assignment of digging up whatever we can for a feature story on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Our editor figures that all the other papers are covering the birth of Jesus and his later life, so we stand a chance of finding something new by taking this angle.

We'll shrink down in size, so we'll literally be like "a fly on the wall." We go to Mary's house, where the angel Gabriel came to visit her....

Luke 1:28-30, New International Version:

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God."

Reporter: Make sure you get that quote down right: "You have found favour with God." We're onto something here! It seems like that's the reason God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus. I wonder why God was so pleased with her. Was she the most virtuous woman around? The boss will want us to check up on that. (To my assistant reporters:) Go and sniff around, talk with the neighbours and with the girls she went to school with. See if you can find out if she's really that clean.

Back to Bruce: What about that idea: Did God choose Mary because she was the best woman in

the world? Does God keep a scorecard for everyone on earth, like sports fans keep track of their favourite hockey players?

Can you imagine God saying, “Let’s see, Andrea Anderson is leading with 753 points for good deeds so far this year, but she loses 252 points for passing on gossip. That puts her in second place behind Joanne Jackson.” That’s the kind of foolishness we get when we try to make God behave according to our way of understanding things.

But even if Mary were the best person on earth, does that mean she was she absolutely perfect and holy? Only someone who was untainted by sin would be worthy to bear the Son of God. No one could be fulfill that requirement, not even Mary. So why her?

Grace: given in love, not something we earn

Go back to the angel’s statement: “You have found favour with God.” The word “favour” means it was an act of kindness, of grace. Grace is not something we earn and deserve; it’s a gift, given out of love. Mary was not expecting this gift, nor did she deserve it. It was pure grace: God’s love and mercy for those who have not earned it.

I’m going to make a turn here. Instead of focussing on Mary, I’m going to focus on grace in this message. Grace is a great teacher. It teaches us two things: to be humble, and to be content.

a) Grace teaches us to be humble

First, grace teaches us to be humble. No one brags about how hard they worked to make the gift they received at Christmas. Neither do we boast about what God has given to us—which is everything.

Mary herself had humility. When she went to stay with Elizabeth, Elizabeth greeted her with the words, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” Mary didn’t let those words of praise go to her head. In Mary’s response, the Magnificat, her focus is completely on what God has done for her and through her, not on what she has done:

Luke 1:46-49, New International Version:

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,
(Why? Because of how great Mary is, and how she was the best person God could find? NO!)

for the Mighty One has done great things for me;
holy is his name.

As Paul wrote:

Galatians 6:14, New International Version:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I heard a story about a millionaire who, while attending a dinner party, heard a discussion on the subject of prayer. After listening for a while, the man of means exclaimed with a sneer, “Prayer may be all right for some of you, but I don’t need it. Everything I have today I’ve worked hard for, and I earned it all myself. I didn’t ask God for anything.”

Another guest was listening and said to the braggart, “There is one thing you don’t have that you might pray for.” Startled, the millionaire blurted out, “And what might that be?” The other replied gently, “Sir, you could pray for humility.”

Grace teaches us to be humble.

b) Grace teaches us to be content

Grace also teaches us to be content. At the end of the conversation between the angel and Mary, Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” She didn’t complain about the extra burden life has given her, not did she present a list of all the perks she wanted. She trusted God, and that gave her contentment.

Imagine another woman being jealous of Mary. She could say, “It’s not fair! Why didn’t I get a chance to be the mother of Jesus?” She could even appeal her case to court, asking for an injunction against God until the matter is resolved.

I know that sounds silly, but isn’t that basically what envy and jealousy are? You don’t think God has been fair to you, so you take God to court, and sue for compensation. Again, this is the foolishness we get into when we try to make God behave according to the way we think things should work.

Besides being silly, envy is also sad, very sad. It means spending my whole life moaning about what I'm missing, instead of giving thanks for what I've got.

Grace means we acknowledge that what we have is entirely due to God's favour upon us. Contentment is having a positive attitude towards life, based on faith that God is leading you.

In the country of Myanmar, there is a legend of a potter who was envious of the prosperity of the man who ran a cleaning shop in their village. The potter was so filled with envy that he set out to destroy the cleaner. The potter persuaded the king to issue an order that required the cleaner to wash one of the king's elephants until it was white. The cleaner replied that according to the rules of his trade he would need a bathtub large enough to hold the elephant.

The king therefore commanded the potter to provide one, which he did. Though it was carefully constructed, the tub crumbled to pieces beneath the weight of the elephant as he tried to step inside.

He made many more tubs, but each was crushed in the same way. Eventually the potter was ruined by the very scheme he had devised to destroy the man he envied!

In the case of Mary, once she understood what was going to happen with the baby and the pregnancy, her response was one of simple contentment: "I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

It is that attitude of contentment with God's grace and God's will, whatever that may be, which is the key to blessings in life. How much better life goes when we go with where God is leading us, than to fight against it!

Next Steps:

- Give thanks for what you've got, instead of moaning about what you've not. In other words, practise contentment.
- Acknowledge that God is the source of it all; God gave you the ability, the resources—everything. Practise humility.
- Offer yourself to God:
"God, I am yours. I'm not much, I know, but what I am, I give to you.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Open my eyes to see the people around me in new ways. Open my ears to really listen to others, rather than plan what I'm going to say next. Open my heart to receive the abundance of your love, so much that I cannot hold it all, and it flows out from me to everyone I am with.

I admit: I am too self-centered to do any of this for any length of time. I need Jesus in my life. Help me grow and be more like him. Amen.