

The Servant of the Lord and the Servant Lord

Luke 1:26-38, Philippians 2:1-9

Our reflections begin with this brief bible study. Please note that the word “angel” in Greek does not mean “angel” with our Blake inspired pictures of winged creatures. It is simply the word for *messenger*. This changes our understanding of the story and our understanding of God, when we say “and there was a messenger who spoke” instead of “and there was an angel who spoke”.

Second. Mary is instructed to name the child Jesus, but I think it is important to understand that “Jesus” isn’t Jesus; it is Joshua, as in JAH SHUA, God saves. Jesus is the Hellenized (Greek) form of the name Joshua.

Third. Note that Mary is afraid of the angel. Duh. This is the historic response to meeting God. God, even in the form of an “angel” is an overwhelming experience. I think this is an important understanding which balances against the “what a friend we have in Jesus” approach.

We now enter the 4th week of Advent. The 4th candle stands for “love”, the love of God which is as near as Mary’s soon to be born child. But we are left with the need to be clear – what is this “love” which is now so near.

In this regard, the scriptures are very helpful – Mary’s response to God is “here I am, a servant of the Lord” and the hymn from Philippians is likewise clear that Jesus gave up equality with God and took human, humble form. Humble even to death.

Mary’s response is **service**. God’s love in Christ is sacrificial **servanthood**.

It is this understanding of servant hood which informs our reflection this morning. A reflection about **Love: what it is and what it is not**

What love is and what it is not is an important distinction because there is a part of us which really wishes that “love” would be easy (“what a friend we have in Jesus”). There is a part of us that wishes that love in the family was as simple as 1957 and “Father knows best”. We wish that marriage was as simple as picture book romance. As I say to young couples, marriage is not about the wedding day, it is about getting up in the morning, stepping over laundry left on the floor and figuring out who will clean the kitty litter pans, and did you get gas in the car? At the same time that fantasy delusion creeps into our notion of love, we have incessant advertising, seeking to replace fantasy -romance -love with love of stuff. Love of things, buy buy buy!

But you see, the fantasies of our desire for simplistic happy love, and the broadcast delusion of consumption, are *attractive* because they distract from the genuine complication which is human life. This complication is not only human need in some far away land, but in the stubborn complexity of life in our own families –where problems extend over years and from generation to generation. Life where problems often do not have a solution, the only solution is endurance.

In contrast to fantasy delusion (as attractive as it may be) I would share with you a contrary voice (from Albert Schweitzer). It is written in terms of Jesus’ call by the lakeshore – a text we will arrive at within 4 weeks – but it applies in Christmas as well!

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side; He came to those men who knew Him not.

He speaks to us the same word: *'Follow thou me!'* and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time.

He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

Albert Schweitzer, Quest for the historical Jesus

In light of Schweitzer's suggestion what can we look forward to in this season?

First, look forward to a sense of God's presence. Whether in the infant in the manger, or in the candlelight reflection, or the sense that in this frantic holiday God is calling us to something more. Further, a sense of God's presence through the fellowship of faith and the fellowship of service.

Second. In our service, we are changed. Life is different when we **give up** thinking we are the center of it. Solitary, self consumed life becomes life in community.

In this regard, when Christ is our life context, what comes to the foreground is compassion, patience, forbearance, and right relationship. The fellowship of Christ, places us squarely in a community of faith and service. We are more than our self. We are the body of Christ, given in service and love. Love.

A real love, God's love, in our real world and in our real life.

Welcome to the fellowship of service, the fellowship of our Servant Lord.