

Advent 4-December 24, 2023

East Nidaros Lutheran Church

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16, and Luke 1:26-38

"According to Your Word"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace mercy and PEACE to you this day from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

It's not surprising that Mary might have been perplexed when Gabriel spoke to her. I suppose that weddings were simpler in her day, but preparing for marriage can be stressful. Couples can receive quite a bit of unsolicited and even unwelcome words from family and friends on what they think would be helpful advice. Mary may have received the same kind of confusing words, until she knew the message that Gabriel brought to her was from the Lord and when she knew the divine source, she was at peace and declared "Let it be, according to YOUR word."

We hear many words in a day. On average we are told that you may hear between 20,000 to 30,000 words in a day. It is estimated that a person can speak nearly 150 words a minute. So, if you watch an hour of the news in the morning, you can have nearly a third of your daily quota of words heard before your day begins. Depending on your job or your personality you also speak several words a day. Again, it varies, but the average person speaks 6000-15000 words in a day. In case you were wondering, research also quickly pointed out that there is no evidence that suggests women say more words than men in a day. Maybe more important and apparently no one has done the research to know if men or women listen more to the words that are spoken in a day.

Another important factor in these many words that you hear each day is where they come from. I like beginning my day with a cup of coffee and watching the morning news, but I don't always pay close attention to the words that I hear in the morning. Unless it is breaking news, I sometimes can't tell you a thing about the news that day. I often put one ear bud in to listen to a podcast from my iPad or phone while watching tv. When I do this, I hear twice the number of words at a time, but I suspect I comprehend less than half of what I hear. Very few of these many words that I hear don't matter to me since they are mostly about someone else, and they are not for me.

Weathermen of course are notoriously criticized for the lack of accuracy of the words they say, but we still listen to them to get some idea of what to expect in the weather for the day. Sportscasters who recap the previous evening sporting events do so with great precision. They often spend more time highlighting what happened on the previous night rather than predicting what the outcome will be in upcoming events.

The source of the words often determines how believable the words are that you hear. In today's first lesson, we heard what God thinks when we make up our own words about what we think God wants us to do. The prophet Nathan was David's close friend, but he also was his pastor. There is another story in scripture when David was heading down some serious pathways of sin when the Lord gave Nathan the words to tell David. Nathan was sent to speak to David after he had coveted, committed adultery, stolen, and committed murder. David's thoughts led him away from the Lord, Nathan's words from the Lord restored him to where he should be.

In the first reading for today, Nathan hadn't been given a message from the Lord to speak to David. He came up with his own words to speak to David. He told David that since the ark of the covenant had been moving around in the mobile church as they wandered in the wilderness, he thought it would please the Lord

if David would build a permanent home to keep the ark and to worship. This time, the Lord wasn't convicting David of sin, but was convicting David's pastor, Nathan, of making up his own words rather than delivering the words that were given to him directly from the Lord. Building a house for the Lord sounds like a good and holy project, but this was Nathan's idea. It was never the Lord's plan. The Lord not only told Nathan and David that it wasn't a good idea to build a house for the Lord, but the Lord also told him that David would never build a house for the Lord. The Lord reminded Nathan and David that he had never asked for help from David. It was the Lord who decided to take David from the pasture watching over sheep to become a prince over his people. David was chosen to do God's work and he was provided with everything he needed to do God's will. David was not chosen by the Lord because he felt David had the skills to do what the Lord needed to be done.

In the gospel for today the angel or messenger or preacher, Gabriel, had a message from the Lord to deliver to the virgin Mary. His first words sounded like the sweetest and most comforting words you would think one could ever hear. "Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you." However, Mary wasn't overcome with joy and comfort. Instead, she was perplexed and wondered what kind of a greeting this could be. Mary's lackluster response did not discourage Gabriel, nor could it change what the Lord had in mind for Mary. Mary was favored by the Lord regardless of her uncertain feelings. Gabriel sensed Mary's fear and spoke again to calm her fears and repeated the first words he said by reminding her again that she had found favor with the Lord. However, the next words that Gabriel delivered also did not ease Mary's fears or questions. Gabriel declared that she would bear a son, name him Jesus, and he would be great, and he would be called the Son of the Most High, and he would give him the throne of his ancestor David.

It is not hard to understand that Mary wondered, "How can this be?" No one else had ever been told that they would be the mother of God and why would the Lord choose her? Gabriel had been given more words from the Lord to speak to ease Mary's fears. Gabriel gave Mary an example of how the Lord's words work by telling her that her relative Elizabeth, who was too old to bear children, was also in her 6th month of pregnancy. We should probably memorize Luke 1:37 and remind ourselves of these words of the Lord as much as we know the familiar words from John 3:16. Whenever we wonder and question how we will get through the challenges that are before us we need to remember Luke 1:37. "Nothing will be impossible with God." These are the words when spoken by Gabriel to Mary that turned her fears into faith and her response from "How can this be?" into "Here I am; let it be according to your word."

We all have moments, days, or seasons in our lives that are like Mary when we hear the words of the Lord, but we wonder "How can this be?" If we are left to our own thoughts and come up with our own words, nothing will be possible. However, Jesus will not leave you with uncertainty and fear. Jesus reminds you of his words promised to you when you were baptized. You, like Mary, became favored by God simply because he chose to favor you. Satan and your own sinful self when things are not going well into doubting these words. This is why we need to hear that the Lord's favor is for you again and again.

Indeed, there are many words that enter your ears from different voices throughout your days. The Lord has set aside this time today for the Lord to speak to you according to his word. You are favored by the Lord. If you wonder how the Lord's favor could possibly be for a sinner like you, rest assured the Lord who created all things out of nothing will do this for you, for "Nothing is impossible with God. Amen