

"WOMEN ON THE EDGE"

Luke 1:42-55

December 9, 2018

Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country,
straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth.
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit,
and sang out exuberantly.

And Mary said, I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me and look what happened - I'm the most fortunate woman on earth! What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

Those of you who grew up in a Bible-reading and churchgoing home know my song as "The Magnificat." When the angel Gabriel brought me the news that I would bear this special child, I couldn't believe it to be true, for I had done nothing to allow for a child to be conceived. Yet, Gabriel

assured me that I would indeed bear a child of lightness, a child destined to drive away the darkness from all humankind.

I am a devoted Jewish girl. I take my prayer life seriously. I am engaged to be married to a wonderful man. He is called Joseph. He is kind and understanding, respectful of me. I am simple, yet don't mistake my simple ways for lack of intelligence. I have an innate sense of the holy; filled with the spirit of God, I live my life so that I will not regret my choices or be ashamed later for them.

Yet, here I am. Pregnant. Visited by God's angel. Unsure what to say to my parents or most importantly, to my fiancée. Gabriel assured me he will speak to Joseph personally. We will see how that one turns out! I feel like a woman on the edge....

I come from a long line of them, you know, women who face the impossible and with God's help, create the possible...

Sarah, wife of Abraham, was too old to bear children. Yet God came to her and told her she would bear a child. Impossible, yet it happened. Isaac became the joy of their lives and the one to carry God's people forward into a new generation. God told Isaac's father, "I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore." (Gen. 22:17)

The same has happened now with my cousin, Elizabeth. She is proof that God can do miraculous things if we will only allow ourselves to be pregnant with the possibility. She is old, yet she carries within her womb a son who shall serve God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. God's favor is upon her and her husband, Zachariah. He is overjoyed, and he sings such a lovely song in admiration and delight at what God has done for them. He sings:

Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
God's Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,

those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
down the path of peace.

In a way of thinking, the stories of Sarah and Elizabeth mirror for us the story of the whole Jewish people. These women on the edge of life show what can be borne out of faith in God and a willingness to put one's foot out before them when called into God-action.

Out of despair is made wholeness; out of barrenness is made creation; out of wonder is made belief. We tend to forget these blessings of the God-centered life. We assume that old women cannot bear children and that young ones cannot bear miracle babies.

We doubt that any good can come out of oppressive circumstances, and we fear the unknown, preferring instead the steady path illuminated by the day. Brian McLaren says it better than I can, perhaps. He writes:

All of us experience this sense of frustration, disappointment, impatience, and despair at times. We all feel we have the capacity to give birth to something beautiful and good and needed and wonderful in the world. But our potential goes unfulfilled, or our promising hopes miscarry. So we live on one side and then on the other of the border of despair.

Sound familiar? Yet, our most vivid dreams come to us in the darkness, yes? It is when the sun has set, and the day's busyness has calmed, that we have our uninterrupted prayer time. It is during the night

hours that our breathing slows and becomes intentionally calm in lockstep with our heart.

It is when we allow our busy minds to have a rest that our creative mind springs into action! Our dreams come. Our dreams go. When we awake, we are refreshed and grateful for the dawn. That's what Zachariah is singing about: the dawn of the new day lived under the warming rays of God's grace! He is singing about the dreams we only dare to dream that *sometimes, sometimes*, actually come true!

It is about hope realized. Our world needs more hope realized. Maybe yours does, too. I suspect so.

Sure, I'm a bit scared, *full* of trepidation. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for the Lord is with you." Yeah, right. How am I supposed to take this news? How am I supposed to believe that God is with me when this potential *disaster* has befallen me? I am not yet married, and here I am pregnant! My mind spins with the fear; my resolve weakens with the reality of my circumstance. I feel alone and I feel afraid, for God's call is hard! God's will doesn't jive with my life plan! There will be questions I cannot answer and recriminations I will face. Yet, I am willing, I am willing to answer God's call on my life, come what may. When God sends an angel, you can't really refuse.

I don't know how my parents will react to my news, but I hope Gabriel visits them, too. I don't know how Joseph will feel, but I know he will stand with me and not let others take me out to be stoned. Angel Gabriel will see

to that. Gabriel will see to that because the world needs its hope realized, and I am its conduit. I will bear this special child, and the whole world will be changed someday for it.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord," I replied. "Let it be with me according to your will."

Have you ever said that before to God? Have you ever just opened yourself up to the "impossible possibility," as Brian McClaren tags it, and allowed your heart to hear God's love song for you? Have you ever been called to let your hope win out over your despair, to let your devotion to God cancel out your self-doubt? That's what I'm talking about! It's God's hand reaching out to you in the darkness of your story and you grasping it with all your might, allowing yourself to be lifted up, carried off, and plunked down where God needs you most!

It's obvious to you, now, what God called me to do, but what about you? Where has God called you to make possibility out of impossibility? Maybe you haven't had an angel come to you out of the blue, but then again, maybe you have, and you just didn't recognize it!

The angel could be that person planting a suggestion within you with some random comment about what you seem to be good at.

The angel could be that newspaper article you glance at in the morning that informs you of an opportunity you hadn't before considered, and your heart skips a beat at the thought of it.

The angel could be that dream that visits you in the night and compels you, upon waking, to mend a relationship long ago violently severed.

The angel could be speaking to you right now in my words, spurring you on to say, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your will."

Maybe the point of my story, the point of Sarah and Elizabeth's too, is to stand with us women on the edge and declare that *nothing that seems impossible* really is. Maybe it is possible for us, as McLaren dreams, to lay down our swords and beat them instead into plowshares. Maybe it is possible that the powerful lions of the world can someday lie down with the most vulnerable lambs, that "God's justice would flow like a river—to the lowest and most 'godforsaken' places on Earth."

Perhaps one day the broken and hungry will be healed and full, full of the good news that God loves them and has sent one man, through me, to prove it to all of humankind who has ears to hear.

This is a pregnant moment, a moment where all those possibilities live for now in our dreams but in our waking hours lie in God's call on our lives.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your will."

Say it along with me now, won't you?

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your will."

There. I don't feel so alone now. What did that feel like to you to say it out loud? Empowering?

Enlivening? Pregnant with the impossible possibility?

May It Be So, my sisters and my brothers. Possibility is about to be born anew.