Sunday 14th August 2022

Luke 2:1-7­

Mary Mother of our Lord

Our gospel of Luke gives scant detail of Mary other than to say she was engaged to Joseph and was expecting a child as they travelled to be registered in Bethlehem. Traditionally, sermons to celebrate Mary focus on her devotion to God. She is our role model. I want to put some flesh on the bones with a creative approach. What does it mean to say ‘yes’ to God? Consider this narrated vignette: from Marlene Marburg.

Mary puts down her sewing knowing that God stitches every stitch with her. You are happy thinking about Joseph how special he is to you and your family as you contemplate your future. He is the answer to your prayer.

Mary, you are overwhelmed with Gratitude to God. You kneel on the ground made smooth and firm through years of treading and seeping. You know that you will soon kneel on Joseph’s wooden floors. You close your eyes. Your mind’s eye is seized by a bright light, and you hear a voice which alarms you. You retreat.

“Do not be afraid.”

You are comforted by these words, gentle in your heart. You whisper; ‘How could I ever be afraid of you O God’?

You are enveloped by stillness which you have come to recognise as the peace of God. Nothing else matters to you. God speaks to you. The messenger’s voice is familiar. You know that God has spoken before. But something is different. You are alert to the truth that this is a turning point for you.

You ask: How can this be?

Almost as you ask you know that the answer is immaterial. You know that in your heart you must put your trust in God’s absolute trustworthiness. You are open to God. Nothing more is necessary. You cannot help but say ‘yes’ to God of your joy, God of your longing. You cannot help but say ‘yes’ to God’s word made real through your participation in mystery.

Mary Prays.

God of love, I have a vision of Your angel. I know you are speaking to me.

What new favour could I possibly have gained? The knowledge of Your greatness in the face of my smallness is a weighty gift. I love You, O God. The more I give you my love, the more You bless me. Until now, you have asked nothing in return except the open-ness of my heart. But today you ask something of me!

I manage to whisper ‘Let it be done unto me according to Your word, Your will, Lord God’.

I am aware that I am kneeling, your touch renews my body my spirit, my emotions my mind. I am aware my body is holy Your life is in the breath I breathe. Every breath is a gift. I say ‘yes’ to You. I cannot imagine a single thought without you. Marburg asks; is there something God asks of you?[[1]](#footnote-1)

God calls to each of us. Without that knowledge I doubt you would be here today. What I like about this imaginal exploration of Mary’s response is that it leads us through steps. There is wondering and prayer and then realisation in the body. As Robert and I have said of recent weeks Mary’s yes is not gender specific. Her model of interacting with the spirit is for all of us.

What I also find grounding about this explanation is that it is of the body. Last week I talked of *sacramental imagination.* Here we have it writ large. I also want to ask about what there is in you that God may be calling you to birth?[[2]](#footnote-2)

The exceptionally wise spiritual writer Jan Richarson has this to say about birthing our own spiritual sense. Using the examples of Mary and Nicodemus she says that Jesus reminds us of the important answer to the question; ‘How can this be?’ A response doesn’t depend on what we see with our eyes or rational mind. It is a Spirit thing. ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you.’ And ‘no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirt.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Jesus invites us to see that something other than chronology has the final power over our lives. This is the way of our spiritual journey. If we seek to grow up, and to grow deep we should ever seek out those who are wiser and more practiced in the growing thing than we are. Even as we hold the spiritual door open for others we are compelled towards humility and hospitality. ‘The wind blows where it chooses’ says Jesus to Nicodemus. The Spirt guides our individual journey. Forward backward untamed and unpredictable. So I return to my question. What birthing and growing thing is going on in you? What encouragement do you need? What action will you take?

Jan Richardson offers these words which she says echo the book of Common Prayer.

With my body

I thee Worship:

with flesh you have fashioned

longing for return,

with heart you have crafted

yearning for repair,

with soul you have tended

aching for communion;

In love and in trepidation,

in doubt and desire,

for better for worse,

I take thee

I take thee

I take thee[[4]](#footnote-4)

Now I return you to the gospel vision of Mary who has given birth and wrapped her babe in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

Richardson writes:

Night has fallen again:

the star has gone,

the shepherds departed,

the angelic voices

Stilled,

the wise men

going home

some other way.

The birthing stains on the ground

will soon be covered over

by the traffic of other travellers.

But on the wall of the cave

a bloodied print

the size of the hand of a man

who listened to dreams

and would not leave her,

and the animals

quiet again

but with a knowing look in their eyes,

and all around

a radiant darkness.

May we bravely face whatever birthing God has in store for us. Knowing that listens to our dreams and will not leave us.

AMEN

References

Richardson, J. *The Painted Prayerbook* p39

Richardson, J. *In Wisdom’s Path* Pilgrim Press Ohio USA 2000

1. Marburg, M. *No Ordinary Woman* pp5-7

2 Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richardson, J. *The Painted Prayerbook* p39 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Richardson, J. *The Painted Prayerbook* p39 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richardson, J. *In Wisdom’s Path* p22 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)