

## **'Stop Moving (Here I Am)!'**

### **Luke 1:26-55**

#### **Intro**

So, I know that we heard a portion of this passage last Sunday,...but let's be honest: does anyone really hear what the minister guy happens to say during 'Nativity Sunday' beyond, 'so who wants to be a sheep, an angel, a shepherd, a wise person?'

Exactly! Very few of us.

So we're going to hear this part of the story again beginning with an angel visiting Mary, before hearing a conversation between two, soon-to-be mom's, and then Mary's response.

As I read it again, what kept ping-ponging through my mind were Mary's words at the conclusion of the visit from the angel: 'here I am'. Think about Mary's response...and then think about your own as you may have felt God's leading in your life. The scripture reads this way.

### **Luke 1:26-55**

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.' <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

46 And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

56 And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

### **'Stop Moving (Here I Am)!'**

The following takes place on a regular basis over at the parsonage: one person starts to talk; the second person responds with a relatively quiet (only because they are on the other side of the house) yell, 'what?!'; at this point person one heads toward where they think person two is located and repeats the question at which point person two again yells back, 'what?!'. Person one calls out, 'where are you?!', to which person two responds, 'I'm over here now!'

Especially considering the fact that you have the possibility of chasing people through the house (because as one person goes down a flight of stairs, the other person invariably starts to go up the other flight of stairs), there are those moments when one or the other person hollers out, 'stop moving!'

I kid you not, it happens at least three times a month between some combination of family members. The more people in the house, the more likely it is to happen. 'I'm over here now!' 'Well stop moving!!'

Do you ever get the feeling that God might have that feeling in regard to us and how we respond (or don't respond) to how He whispers into our lives?

And then a follow up question for those of you who are thinking, 'so, I don't think that I've ever really heard God whispering into my life', could it be that the reason that you haven't heard is because of the fact that your perpetual movement leaves you too distracted to recognize, let alone hear God?

Ok, let me back up for a second.

I totally appreciate that many people would hear where I am going with these verses and immediately respond by saying, 'but Ryan: you're talking about Mary and Elizabeth here! These are two individuals who were specially and specifically chosen by God to serve in extremely important ways' (aka: being the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist certainly qualifies as such!).

The bugger of it is though, that their particular calling to serve through the miraculous ways that they were informed, does not mean that the rest of us receive nothing from God in terms of the whispers from the Holy Spirit.

In fact, I would purport the exact opposite. The reason that I say that is because of what it says in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John when Jesus states, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' Jesus told us (through the scriptures) that after he was no longer on this planet that we would have an advocate, the Holy Spirit, which would continue to whisper the truth of God into our lives. That whispering is very much in the same vein as what Jesus said to his disciples: God is still speaking, and He is speaking so that we might ultimately follow.

And we all know that hearing God, especially to the point of saying, 'here I am', means that our faith is intentionally engaged.

That doesn't mean that we get everything that we are being led to engage in!

But instead, that we allow our faith to continue to speak into and through our lives to the point that we are willing to acknowledge, 'God, was that you?', which opens us up to hear, see, feel those points of confirmation.

Because the story of Mary doesn't feel like our story. Mary is...well, Mary, and regardless of whether or not Mary (as an archetypal figure) gets placed on some sort of a pedestal as other faith communities do, we do have to acknowledge that we view Mary as being particularly special in the plan of God.

Maybe it's not appropriate to think that (after all: aren't we all children of the living God?).

But even if the specialness that we extend to Mary is because she received and had that conversation with the angel Gabriel, there is some separation between our perception of her life and her faith as opposed to our lives and our faith.

The wonderful thing is though, regardless of the uniqueness that we extend to Mary, we are still able, through her story, through her response, to recognize the flow of faith that each of us have been caught up in, even if it's in the smallest of ways. God speaks, God whispers, and when we are intentionally plugged into the faith that we have been led to acknowledge, we start to (at the very least) catch moments when we feel that leading to give of ourselves for no other reason than because it's the, ...not just the right thing to do, but through the eyes of faith, in the flow of faith, it's the God thing to do.

Mary's gift to the faithful is not that she was some sort of super woman: but that, because of her faithfulness, she was willing to trust, even if she didn't understand. She was willing to stop moving for God and say, 'here I am.'

So many of us live our lives like it's a rat race: what's next, gotta win, never stop because if you stop then someone else is going to get by you and get to the cheese first. I think that this is the case not only because of what I see in and around myself, but because of what I see us teaching our kids.

Here's what I mean: beginning in what feels like around fifth grade (and certainly no later than seventh grade) our kids are inundated with the thoughts that if their academic profile isn't as strong as it can possibly be, from educational standing to extra-curricular activities, that they will end up being passed by. By this I mean that they won't be able to get into the best possible school, and that if they don't get into the best possible school, then they are not going to be as successful as they could be, as they should be (take note, we don't say that they failed...but the feeling of failure is completely understood without a word being said).

Think I'm way off the mark? I invite you to head to the high school when the parents of the incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade kids have their orientation. It's all about making yourself as a student look better than 'the other guy'. It's not about being the best possible you: it's about looking better than 'the other guy'.

That's what we're teaching our kids. We teach our kids what we think should be important in our own lives (whether or not we actually live that way is a whole other matter). Therefore, at some level, we think that it's important to get to what's next, to win, to never stop.

And then the story of Mary being in the flow of faith shows up and it so feels like that moment when we are walking very quickly through the parsonage trying to catch up to where we think the other person is but we can't quite catch up until someone finally says, 'stop moving!'. Scripture passages like the one

that we have heard from today are not meant to make us feel guilty because we're not Mary or Elizabeth.

God doesn't want you to be Mary or Elizabeth!

God wants you to be the you, you were created to be!

And that's where Mary's example becomes important for all of us: she was willing to slow down and abide in the Creator of all. That trust exhibited itself in her ability to say, 'here I am'.

Our response might not be the same. Our response might be, 'God,...was that You leading what I think of as my conscience to care, to serve, to love?'

Maybe your response will be, 'ummm,...what was that?'

I don't think it matters! Because if we are willing to even slow down and abide in God just a little more, I trust that God's Spirit will empower us to do His will even if we aren't actually able to acknowledge God in the midst of that situation. To God be the glory...even if we didn't know that was where the glory was going.

I get it: it's the day before the day before Christmas. The idea of slowing down for anything seems counter intuitive.

And yet our passage whispers a still better way.

Slow down, maybe even stop moving...for just a minute, and embrace the God of all just a little bit more. Maybe as you start to get used to that feeling of abiding in Him, you might find yourself saying, 'here I am'.

God doesn't want you to be anyone else other than who you are becoming in Him. Slow down...just a little bit more and abide in His presence. As you do, you will be able to, in your own way, say, 'here I am'.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, we are here...and yet, in so many ways we struggle to hear Your voice and feel Your leading...because we need to succeed, be the best, maybe even win. And then we hear the story of Mary. We know that her story is so different than ours, but her example, her example is something that we are able to resonate with. Lord, help us to slow down, even a little bit, so that we are able to feel the flow of the faith that You have led us to, so that we too, in our own way, are able show Your love and allow Your light to shine. Lord, let it be so. Amen.