

Sermon December 24th, 2023 Advent Four

God's Invitation for Us

In our everyday lives we experience God. Like, in the meaningful interactions we have with people we meet. Or, in the taking of communion. Or, in the hearing of the Word. Or, in the art of prayer. Or, in the act of service for others. Or, in the fellowship with other believers. In our everyday lives we experience God.

And then there are those moments where God goes out of God's way to get our attention. Where God stops us in our tracks, and invites us to walk in a new direction (**Image One**: person standing at the crossroads).

For example, you are struggling in your career. Your boss is pushing you too hard. You are not getting along so well with your fellow workers. You can't seem to find the motivation to do the work. Not like you did when you first started. You are having a difficult time seeing how your job is impacting the community in a positive way. All these factors get you to start reflecting on why this career matters to you? And is it time for a change? (**Image One**)

In worship on Sunday morning, you hear something in a song and then in the sermon that talks about someone going through a big change, and how God breathes new life into them in the midst of this change. Reigniting their passion for life.

Later that week you come across an ad on your Facebook page that is inviting you to enter a program at the university to train for a career you wanted to do ever since you were a child. Something that your parents had told you was just a pipe dream.

You go through a period of discernment where you reflect on different questions that come to mind when thinking of making this transition (**Image One**). You listen for answers. After hearing God's confirmation, you decide to enter the program at the university. Believing that God is inviting you to walk in this new direction (**Image Two**: person walking down a new pathway into the unknown but with a light shining). Remembering that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of you that with God anything is possible.

Or, as a church, we start to see signs within a ministry we are doing that tell us that God might be inviting us to walk in a new direction. We see that very few people are feeling engaged in the ministry. We are not seeing this ministry bear fruit like it once did. The volunteers are getting tired, burnt out. We are starting to think that the only reason we are keeping this ministry going is because of a feeling of nostalgia.

So, after some reluctance, we enter into a period of discernment (**Image One**). We explore. We ask questions. We listen for God's answers. We then put our trust in God as we walk in this new direction (**Image Two**). Remembering that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of us that with God anything is possible.

Or, you are feeling a strong pull to have another child. On your daily strolls, you seem to see so many babies around. And they seem so happy and peaceful. You then go to pick up the Bible, and read a story of Hannah praying for the birth of a child. You then go to Christmas Eve service and hear the story of the baby Jesus. You start to think "this can't be a coincidence can it?" You then start a period of discernment (**Image One**) where you ask questions, and listen for God's answer. Then you choose to walk in this new direction (**Image Two**). Remembering that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of you that with God anything is possible.

Or, you are feeling that your family plan is complete. On your daily strolls, you see siblings fighting with each other. You hear babies crying. You smell poopy diapers. An afternoon at your sister's house with her younger children leaves you feeling exhausted. On Sunday morning you hear the story of the rebellion of King David's son. You start to think "God is really trying to tell me something here." You then start a period of discernment where you ask questions, and listen for God's answer (**Image One**). Then you choose to walk in this new direction (**Image Two**). Remembering that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of you that with God anything is possible.

There are moments throughout our lives where God gets our attention, and invites us to walk in a new direction (**Image Two**).

In our gospel, God gets Mary's attention through the mediation of an angel. God is inviting Mary to walk in a new direction. To give birth to the Messiah. The Son of God. The one who will come into the world and liberate God's people from oppression, from sin. Mary enters into a period of discernment where she reflects on different questions (**Image One**). She listens for the angel to answer her questions. When the angel does, Mary is confident that God is indeed inviting her to walk in this new direction. She puts her trust in God (**Image Two**). Remembering that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of her that with God anything is possible.

As we discern together over the next year the new direction God is inviting us to walk down (**Image One**). As we go through this period of exploration and questioning. As we listen for God's answers to this exploration, to these questions. May we put our trust in God (**Image Two**). May we remember that when the anxiety and fear that comes with change tries to get the best of us that with God anything is possible. And may we see

as the shepherds do on Christmas night when their lives change forever, that the new life God promises us in the midst of our anxiety and uncertainty shines brightly in the baby Jesus (**Image Three:** the nativity).

Let us pray, loving God, as we discern where you are inviting us to walk, open our ears to listen for your voice. Open our hearts to trust in you. Open our minds to remember that with you anything is possible. Open our eyes to see the new life that you will breathe in us as we walk in this new direction. **Amen.**

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