

Sermon 2023 12 24 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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Today calls us into extremely close proximity between the carrying of a saviour within Mary's body and the birth of that saviour.

And down the centuries comes those haunting words of Mary:-
"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord:
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
Who has looked with favour on his lowly servant:
from this day all generations will call me blessed."

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If we sit quietly with those words, we come to a realisation that God's calling of Mary, while it is a great thing, is no greater than God's calling to us.

Mary's self perception is that the appearance of God in her life, asking great things of her, is a relative normal thing.

While she is called to a massive task, the calling – in and of itself – does not send her screaming.

And I have a suspicion that this is because she has been raised and taught in the faith that one day God will come to her, and ask her to take on some duty – large or small – that will proclaim the Good News and will draw her into a place that she has been called to occupy before birth.

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Within the Celtic Tradition of spirituality there is a term called the “second sight”. This means “the two sights”, one refers to the inner “seeing” into the spirit world, and the other as our normal sight into the everyday world.

It is a practice that is largely discredited by those who do not believe, but is not all that different from “Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams.” As we find it in Acts 2 and a number of other places.

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I know that I have told you before that on the day of my birth, an old Scots woman who claimed to have the “second sight” managed to evade the guarding nurses and slip in to see my mother long enough to tell her I would be a priest before escaping the confines of the maternity ward. How that story was repeated to me time and again, And how my Father who was not big on church accepted, without hesitation, that I had received words of calling. Because, unbeknown to me it had been a regular topic of conversation between my parents.

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And I want to say that I am not special – that, like Mary, everything that flows through and in me, does not have its origins in me or its endings in me – for all things come from God and go to God.

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What we all must have is an openness and a wiliness to allow God to calls us and flow through us as conduits of his salvation to the world.

We need to allow God to work through us as conduits of salvation – regardless of whether what comes through is considered by us as great or small, whatever God gives us is integral to the life of service, embracing love and salvation that serves his people and the whole of his creation.

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But the popularity of the Church ebbs and flows, and so does humanity's response to the spirit of salvation.

The last high point of the Church was just post WWII as people struggled to rebuild their lives in an environment of uncertainty. It was a time when a power beyond humanity was desperately needed to rebuild shattered lives, shattered families and shattered communities.

As our peaceful security has increased, we tended to forget that this reborn society was based on the rock of faith.

And subsequent generations have seen a world built on human will and human vanity.

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We have become an increasingly selfish world who believe in the power of our own wealth, strength and intellect. More and more our lives are dedicated to the accumulation of things.

Or we look for relationships which serve "my" needs and do not worry about the needs of others.

The cults of individuality and greed engulf our world and lessen our humanity because it is always about the self.

Selfishness always draws us away from God. It is the very opposite of true love, and it denies the purpose and the reason for our creation – that we should be the very best of what God has made and in doing that that we should expand the range of people who we embrace in love.

Selfishness also draws us into a life of regret – that because we fail to tell or show others that we love them, we miss the chance and suddenly they are gone. And with their departure we live with a hollowness because we did not take the time. We threw away our time when a momentary embrace or a few simply words would have given our life depth and meaning instead of regret.

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In recognising that we are all called to be conduits of God's love flowing into the world, in recognising that the passion we feel for the rest of humanity does not come from us – but desperately needs our co-operation flow on to others, we come to realise that the church is rebuilt when we are at our best in responding to God's call.

Our advent needs to be a focus on openness. Openness to God; openness to humanity.

Mary was so open to the needs of humanity that she allowed the fulness of salvation to flow through her in human form.

The great Adventist challenge to us is to go and do likewise.

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