

Sunday, December 11, 2016 - All Things New: Cooperate with God

Luke 1:26-38 CEB

Marysville United Methodist Church

Pastor Jenny Smith

Today we're going to talk about what it feels like to not cooperate with someone and then what it feels like to cooperate with God. We'll look a little at Mary's life and see her pattern of doubt and faithfulness. I'll invite you to find yourself in her story.

I love to do yoga. My 2 year old son often doesn't like when I do yoga. He wants me to play with him. So when I do yoga in the evenings, I'm usually being pushed and pulled by a 2 year old boy shouting, "No oga! No oga!" One night recently I heard myself saying in a pretty firm voice, "Wesley, I will not let you tell me what to do. This is not okay. I am an adult. I'm allowed to do yoga on the floor. I will give you my full attention when I'm done." I couldn't believe I was having this conversation with a 2 year old. But I wasn't going to let him push me around!

What does it feel like to not cooperate? For some, it's a deep resistance to seeing someone else with authority. Why do they get to tell me what to do? Why would I trust someone else knows what's best for me?

But at some point, we hit a wall, rock bottom, we get to the end of ourselves and **realize we aren't enough**. We look over the proverbial edge and see that we don't have all the wisdom, energy, direction and love we need for this life. We sense there might be more going on in our world that we can't physically see. And not in a creepy, magical kind of way. But there's a hum to this universe. A way of creation that's bursting forth inside of us. We get glimpses of freedom, of wholeness, of joy and it seems like it comes from something bigger than us.

When we start to explore that and possibly call it God or Holy Spirit or Creator or the Divine, there's a shift in who we are. Part of us bows down and says, "You are my Lord. You created me. You are bigger than me. Your wisdom is more than I can imagine. I release my need to be in control. I choose to trust someone outside of myself. And this someone happens to be the creator of the universe." **That** is cooperating with God.

It doesn't mean we don't doubt, challenge God, ask hard questions, walk away sometimes and do it our own way. But at the end of the day, we are choosing to place our trust in God. We're willing to let God lead.

Well, what about Mary? Did she let God lead? Eventually yes, but she had some pointed questions first.

Let's track how this went down:

1. God's love for her is announced.
2. She's confused.
3. Angel: Don't be afraid. God loves you.
4. Part of the plan is shared.
5. Mary questions and clarifies the plan.
6. Angel: Holy Spirit has it covered. And you're not the first.
7. Remember, nothing is impossible for God.
8. Mary cooperates.

Where do you see yourself in Mary's story? (This is when the Bible comes to life by the way. When we see ourselves in these pages).

Are you sensing a shift into a new season in life and you're confused? You'd like to know a bit more of the plan. Or you'd like there to be a plan at all.

Is it news to you that God favors you? That you are loved beyond anything you thought possible? Don't rush through that step. It can take a lifetime to allow the love God has for you to change everything about how you see yourself and others.

Maybe a plan is coming together but you have **a lot** of questions. (That's how I sometimes feel about the single board governance transition! All signs are looking good. But I'd like it to work well now!)

Or maybe you're in a situation where you know what you should do but it feels like no one has walked this path before. Your invitation may be to reach out in a new way to a new person and hear their story.

And maybe you simply need to be reminded that **nothing is impossible for God. Nothing.**

Then we choose again to cooperate with God. We let God lead.

Most mornings, I write and journal letters to God. It's not fancy and there's no pressure. I simply write about what I'm thinking and learning and struggling with. There's an interesting entry in my journal on August 31 of this year that relates to our conversation today. I wrote this:

God, I keep hearing you tell me, "let me lead." It feels like it's getting louder. More firm and a bit urgent.

I'm listening.

It's almost as if I could kind of get by up to this point but now it's uncharted territory. And you're not going to let me mess this up, are you?

Every church and individual has to ask themselves this question from time to time: "Are we doing anything that requires faith?" Or are we filling our lives with things we understand and know the basic outcome? That doesn't require faith. And doesn't grow us as followers of Jesus.

Serving in this role has forced me to rely on God more than I ever have before. And it's caused my faith to deepen in ways I didn't see coming.

And as we move into a new year together as a church, I hear God saying loud and clear to me and to you, **"let me lead."**

This is our invitation. Will we show up to our community and each other? Will we pay attention to the stories, the pain, the joy? Will we cooperate with God's leading? Can we then release the outcome of our efforts? This is our journey all year long, and especially at Advent as we prepare to receive Christ in a new way.

"Cooperate" means to act jointly and work toward the same end. When we say yes to God (for the 1st or the 50th time), we are choosing to cooperate with God. To love the people God loves, especially when others don't love them. To let God lead. And this choice so often leads to joy.

Pure joy that bubbles up in our hearts because we're off the hook. The freedom is palpable when we choose to trust God is already at work. The pressure is off.

And the deepest part of who we are that resists cooperation - of someone telling us what to do - it finally breaks free, and **our soul finds joy in being led.**

I pray for each of us a slow Advent season full of good memories, quiet moments to reflect while we prepare our hearts to become new this Christmas. Amen!