

SERMON : FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT 2020 (Luke 1:26-38)

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

I am tired of preaching about Advent. I'm tired of preaching about the coming Christ-child. I'm tired of nativity scenes and statues. Most of all, I'm sick of being asked to bless trees and cleaning Advent candle wax off the carpet. In fact, next year I'd rather skip Advent, forego Christmas altogether, forget about the Ascension, and head right for Easter. How many times can a preacher really breathe life into Advent and Christmas sermons?

Why bother? After all, aren't all of you in those pews numb to the birth story anyway?

Even most non-Christians know the basics of the story. Year in and year out we sing the Carols and spend countless hours preparing children's plays. Preaching to the birth of Jesus can easily become just another part of the routine of "doing church".

Ministers and parishioners alike become so familiar with the birth narrative of Jesus that *maybe we now fail to recall its importance in the life of Christ and the life that Christ gives.*

Do we abdicate Advent because we are too familiar with the Sunday terms - Hope, Peace, Joy, Love? Do we muddle the message with a half-hearted attitude? We need to revitalise Advent and Christmas ... so ... sit up !! Pay attention!!

The gospel passage we have just shared, "The Annunciation to Mary" IS A TRULY REMARKABLE TEXT ... **it's the story of "The Impossible Possibility of Our God" !!** <PAUSE>

This story of Gabriel's announcement to Mary is surrounded by the impossible. The angel's confession that "nothing is impossible for God" must have truly stunned Mary and then goes on to find its deepest meaning in that a barren, elderly woman is pregnant, and that she, Mary, a young teenage girl from a nothing town is "favoured" by God.

Once again, our imaginations - limited by our human-ness - are turned upside down. These things just don't happen do they?

Do you get this? Do you grasp the enormity of what is being said and what is about to take place?

One of the greatest challenges of preaching this gospel is somehow to create the movement from impossible to possible, to let God's possibility ring new and true and whole when all we know in OUR world, in OUR experiences, in OUR understanding, in OUR lives, it's impossible.

I've actually sat in Archdeaconry meetings and listened to some of my sisters absolutely deny the Virgin birth! They state that it's just silly. It's just impossible. Our frail humanity at work. As always, I say, "Don't worry ... it's perfectly okay to believe in something that we don't understand."

Mary herself acknowledges the impossible possibility of God with her first response to Gabriel. She is utterly perplexed. She ponders, debates with herself, about the angel's greeting when the only thing Gabriel has said so far is, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." Mary's initial response - this pondering (read : significant pause) - is a reflection of how stunned she is; and yet, the angel has barely said a thing!

Why is Mary bewildered? I'm calling attention to Mary's response to the angel's first words to emphasise to what extent Mary cannot believe this impossible possibility. Me? Who am I? Why am I favoured? How can the Lord be with me? She knows her place. She knows who she is. And this should not be happening. She's a teenager, and from the wrong side of the tracks.

Gabriel then tells her the big news that she's going to be pregnant with a son, but not just any son, the Son of the Most High, no less, from the lineage of David, with a never-ending kingdom. OK. What? Yeah ... right "How can this be?"

Can you hear the disbelief and total incredulity in Mary's voice? Or, do you just sit there and think, "I've heard this before - no big deal!"

That relegates Mary's true astonishment to "nothingness" and misses the grace and majesty of our God who's love is beyond our understanding! *Nothing is impossible for our God and in His love He is sending His only begotten Son to US to be.*

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin called Mary.

The Impossible Possibility of God !!!

This is real knock-yer-sock-off stuff. <PAUSE>

So, David, ... HOW DARE YOU SAY you are tired of preaching about Advent? HOW DARE YOU say you are tired about preaching about the coming Christ-child?

Oh you frail human ... because, honestly, how can I ever grow tired of speaking to the glory of our God who makes all things possible? Who transforms a virgin to a mother; a peasant girl to the mother of God?

How can I ever fail to recognise that these events of Annunciation and Incarnation changed the world AND took a wretch like me from denial to discipleship.

So ... let's GET REAL and acknowledge the Impossible Possibilities of God !!

Let's allow Mary's story to move us all from who we think we are to what God has called us to be, from quiet believer to confessing apostle. Moreover, it is no small journey to go from our comfortable perceptions of God to God in the manger, vulnerable, helpless, dependent. Yet, this is the promise that our Advent journey has brought us to. This is the promise of the coming Christ-child. This is the promise of Christmas.

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>