



Sermons **from Northwood United Church**

“Awake and Grounded.”

Psalm 126, Luke 1:46-55

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I don't know about you but I love a good storm. The storms a couple of weeks back that buffeted the side of my house with wind and rain made me worried about the health of our shingles but my worry was eclipsed by my enjoyment of being nestled in bed and hearing the wildness outside. Treena and I love to go to Tofino in February because the storms are so great. One of my favorite storm experiences was climbing Idaho Peak in the west Kootenays in the middle of a thunder storm. It was fascinating. Every few minutes we could hear this crackling around us and we knew that lightning had struck somewhere on the mountain. We made a dash for the forest service fire lookout at the top because it made the best refuge to wait out the storm. This tower had cables going from peak to the ground to preserve it in these very conditions, and I will never forget the feeling of standing under those grounding cables as the storm blew over. I could actually feel the hairs on my head and arms standing on end. As lightning flashed around us we did not get hit, but I could feel the electricity in the air and I was glad to be in a well-grounded place. Being grounded did not make the storm go away, but it did give us the security that we would be fine through it.

Calling someone well-grounded is a real complement. To be well grounded is to be down to earth, to have a good mental and emotional foundation that is not easily shaken. A well-grounded person is the kind who can see, in the midst of a really bad year that not all years will be like this. There is a confidence in a well-grounded person that I admire. When Paul made his list of spiritual gift in his letter to the Corinthians, he mentioned prophesy, teaching, tongues, interpretation, but he never mentioned groundedness. I think he should have.

To be grounded is to have your eyes open and clear to reality- to be without illusions. Those who are grounded have their feet firmly planted in reality.

Now, I don't know if Mary was a well-grounded human being, but an unexpected pregnancy will certainly test your grounding. And I am sorry if I lack in imagination, but I kind of wonder about her reaction to the news she receives. This teenager from Nazareth has just learned that she is pregnant out of wedlock and the reaction Luke's gospel gives is a mild mannered "How can this be" followed after a rather magical explanation from the angel, with an agreeable "Let it be so." Forgive me but I can't help imagining some rather less grounded reactions, like hysterical tears, like "my life is now over," like "AHH!! Joseph will never have me now!"

Now, obviously I have never been pregnant but I am quite aware of the way in which pregnancy can immediately bring to the surface the reality of your life. "I can't be pregnant now- I don't have a job! How am I going to support this family and another small child?" Reality. "Pregnant!?! That changes everything! We thought we would never have kids!" Reality. "Pregnant!?! What kind of a place is a refugee camp to bring a child into the world?" Reality. If you are not grounded in reality before a pregnancy, well you sure will be afterwards.

Have you heard about that computerized doll that they are using in the schools these days. They call it "Baby think it over." The students take it home and have to take care of it like it is a real child and it is programmed to need changing and feeding and cuddling and everything an

infant needs, and the computer records the treatment it gets. The idea, of course, is a dose of reality. A pregnancy brings reality into sharp focus.

But a pregnancy also gives rise to some deep thinking about our hopes and dreams. Is our life really going where we want it to go? Is the world into which we will be bringing this child really the world the way we want it to be? Are we living the life we feel called to live? Is our life what we dreamed it would be? What kind of way of living will we be showing this child? A pregnancy can not only ground us in reality, but it can also ground us in our hopes and dreams.

I will never cease to be shaped by the birth of my first child. It was in the late 80s, coming to the end of the cold war during which time I had been quite involved in the Peace Movement and increasingly involved in social justice movements in Central America. I was acutely aware of the state of the world. And I will always remember as if it were yesterday the first time I ever held her, not 30 seconds old, in my arms. And I looked into these fresh and beautiful eyes and I said to her, "Welcome to this world!" I was immediately flooded with two overwhelming feelings: wonder at the miracle of this child in my arms, and responsibility to make sure that this world is one that welcomes this child, makes room for this child, is habitable for this child.

We don't get the benefit of hearing the reality into which this pregnancy grounded Mary. The scriptures give us no clues about the mental, emotional, practical reality of this unwed teen mother. That is not what the scripture wanted us to focus on. We do however, get the benefit of hearing the hopes and dreams into which this pregnancy grounded her, because she goes off to see her sister who is also pregnant and she sings her song of a great turning within the life of her people. A great turning reminiscent of the great turning the Psalmist dreams up. The poor are lifted, the mighty oppressors brought low. The hungry fed. And there is joy in these dreams and there is hope. When we expect a child or a grandchild, when we look forward to the world that will be theirs, we, like Mary, become grounded, deeply aware of the reality in which we live but also the deepest longings of our hearts and our people.

For Mary, I can't help but believe that this surprising pregnancy would give rise to a dazzling thunderstorm of thoughts, feelings, worries fears... real and imagined. She was a human being after all, just like you and me. But she was a human being grounded in the promise of God- that God would be with her, that somehow she was called to bear God in the world, that her dreams and her reality were somehow bound up with God's dreams and God's reality. This too is true for you and true for me. You have dreams and you have realities.

What gets me through, what allows me moments of groundedness and grace in the midst of it all, is the belief, the trust that was in Mary, and that has been saving grace to me over and over- the trust that somehow, somehow, my and my people's realities and God's realities, my and my people's dreams and God's dreams are bound up together. Mary's trust, our trust is like the grounding wires on the top of a mountain in a thunderstorm. It doesn't make the storm go away but it makes it possible to say, as Mary said, "Let it be to me, according to your word." Amen.