“How Could This Be?”

Luke 1:26-55

December 17, 2017

How many of you have seen a TED talk before? TED talks began in 1984 as a conference for technology and design. Now it has broadened its scope to include topics in science, academic and cultural issues. Their mission is all about bringing forth ideas that are worth spreading. A TED talk is usually a 12-20 minute speech on something that is a simple idea that can promote big change. One TED talk that I watched this week was called “My Choice to Live Child-Free”. A young woman named Christen Reighter spoke about her desire not to have children and all of the fallout from that decision. She begins speaking about how our roles as humans dictate how we operate in the world. Early on in childhood we are assigned roles by society. Women and men are supposed to have children. You are supposed to want to have them. I knew from an early age that I wanted to have children, and now that dream has come true. For others, it can be someone else’s dream. For Christen, she knew from an early age that she did not want children. She always recognized that people would say, “When you have children”, not if. When she would tell someone her desire not to have kids she would get a lot of strange responses. Do your parents know? Does your husband know? That is selfish. That flies in the face of the biblical idea of be fruitful and multiply. All of this was described with her story of trying to get her tubes tied. She had to shop around to multiple Obstetricians to get this procedure done. While shopping around she was subjected to many indignities while trying to find the right doctor. The requirements for her state were to be at least 21, appear of sound mind and there is a thirty-day waiting period. She met those requirements but still she had many issues. She would receive responses like, come back when you have a child. She did a lot of researching and realized that one in five US women will not have biological children. She felt like she was on the stand being cross-examined. “What happens when your partner wants children”, is one question she was asked. Don’t worry she answered, my stance on childbearing is always first-date conversation. We as a culture have big ideas and want to intrude on decisions such as this. The surgeons that worked on this conference were over heard in the hallway speaking of Christine as a “little girl”. There is this idea out there that being a true woman means being a mother. Her argument is that a woman’s value should not be about whether or not she has a child. It is not her purpose here on earth. So, what about Mary? Is she only worthwhile because she gave birth to the Son of God? Did she have a choice in the matter?

The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth. This is the second trip by Gabriel that we know of in the bible. He had earlier appeared in the book of Daniel to help Daniel understand his visions within the broader theme of Israel’s history. So when Gabriel comes to see you, it is gonna be HUUGE. He first shows up in Luke to Zechariah. Zechariah was a priest and was praying. Gabriel shows up and terrified Zechariah. Gabriel explains that his barren wife will bear a Son and you shall name him John. This son will prepare people for the Lord. “How will I know this is so? For I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years?” Zechariah responds in shock. Well Zechariah since you didn’t believe me, you will be struck mute until John is born.

Gabriel heads to Nazareth six months later. He came to meet Mary, a virgin who was engaged to Joseph from the house of David. “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.” Mary was much perplexed. Hearing words such as this would remind her of things of old if she had any familiarity with scripture. What big news is going to come my way? “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Wow. Okay, what to with all of this news. This is a young teenage girl after all. With Elizabeth, the news of a child coming to her and Zechariah, they were prepared, they had been waiting years. But Mary, maybe not quite ready yet. How can this be, since I am a virgin? Do I have a choice in all of this?

Right now, choice is the key word of our cultural moment. With women coming out accusing high profile men of sexual assault or harassment. Guys like Harvey Weinstein, Al Franken, Roy Moore and many more men to come have been accused and forced to step down from their positions of power. These men have been making sexual advances on women who had no choice in the matter. Years and years of cover up and abuse. We are all kind of on high alert over issues of sexual harassment. Who is next? Where is the line? How do we relate with coworkers? Etc? We read scripture with our eyes and ears of the present moment. To hear an Angel tell a teenage girl that you are going to be pregnant because God said so, sounds pretty scary.

Legend has it that Mary is not the first girl who was asked to bear the Son of God. Just imagine that for a moment. Do not be afraid, Lauren, for you have found favor with God, and now you will bear a son named Jesus. Hold up angel, I am too young. So Gabriel moves on. Do not be afraid, Jackie, for you have found favor with God, and now you are to bear a son. Gabriel, I just don’t think I am up to all of that. Gabriel continues on as the messenger of God. Hopefully this Mary will be the one to say yes? Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God, and now you are to bear a son. How can this be, since I am a virgin? Finally, a question that Gabriel can work with. Not an objection, just a statement of bewilderment. How is this going to work in a biological sense? Gabriel with a sense of relief continues on, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, he will be called the Son of God. Guess what your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, she is six months along for one who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”