

Holy One, draw us into the story, that we might see ourselves there and know your presence in our own lives. Amen

I don't know about you, but I'm a big Grey's Anatomy fan. If you don't know it, it's a TV series about a fictional Seattle hospital and its medical staff. There are two things that have kept me tuned into this series since its inception in 2005. First is that they don't shy away from controversial social issues, and second is that there is a perfect mix of drama and joy.

As one might expect, this season's focus has been on Covid-19 and the impact it has on medical staff, patients and their families. As I said, they haven't shied away from the pain, agony and grief that these people experience. At times, it's been hard to even watch, knowing how close to reality it is.

However, in last week's episode, joy slips in through a most unexpected door.

An exhausted surgeon is seen walking down the hospital corridor when a nurse calls out to ask her what she's doing.

"I've just come from surgery" the doctor explains. "I'm going to rest."

"Well, we need you in here, right now."

"Why, what's going on?" the doctor asks

"There's a baby coming, NOW!"

"I'm not in pediatrics." The surgeon tries to explain. "Call someone else."

But as it turns out, nobody else is available and the baby, having a will of its own, isn't waiting.

"I've never delivered a baby. I don't know what to do" the young surgeon protests.

Taking her by the arm, the nurse leads the surgeon into the delivery room saying “We know what to do, but we need a doctor to do the delivery. We’ll walk you through it. You just need to listen to us.”

The whole scene reminds me of Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel. Because, although it may at first seem like an ask, like a “would you mind?” a “what would you think of” or a “do you have a minute to consider?” in fact, there is no ask at all.

Today’s scripture story is called the Annunciation, because it is just that, an Announcement, not an invitation. Like the nurse, Gabriel is pretty clear as to what WILL happen and like the doctor, Mary WILL need to listen and follow instruction.

That’s what really struck me when I read today’s text ... it’s the WILLS that dominate the story. You maybe didn’t catch it, I know I’ve never noticed it before, but just listen to the way in which Gabriel presents what is about to happen.

“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." ...

Mary isn’t given the option to think about it, to mull it over, to oh, say, get back to Gabriel in a few days. This is a fait accompli. Even in her questioning, ‘**How will this be**’ Gabriel’s response does not waver.

“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 Son of God.

When we hear this story each year, we often consider Mary’s options, her bravery, her faithfulness. We wonder how she can possibly agree so quickly to this request. But in fact, it isn’t a request at all. It isn’t even an invitation but rather, it’s more of a “Prepare yourself.” Prepare yourself for what God is about to do, because this is what WILL happen...and soon!

Sure, there’s a chance Mary could attempt to walk away. There’s a chance the surgeon might refuse to enter the birthing room. But the reality is, both of these women are compelled to follow the call, to trust that they might be of use in this birthing situation, and they are willing to give up control to another; to listen and do what they are being called to.

So it should be of no surprise that Mary’s response is a clear and certain **“I will”**. Notice she doesn’t say “I accept”. She knows it’s already a done deal. Rather, her response is one of acknowledgement. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

With this single encounter with the angel Gabriel, Mary becomes clear about who she is and how she is being called to live her life. She begins, to recognize the role she will play in bringing new life, new hope and new joy into a suffering world. There is no question as to whether she will accept or not, it is simply a convergence of WILLS, so to speak. ...

After delivering a beautiful, healthy baby boy and laying him on his mother’s chest, the surgeon is over-come with emotion. After seeing so much death and sorrow, the opportunity to bring new life into the world, fills her with a sense of hope.

Joy that comes from somewhere deep inside of her spills out of her eyes and she is deeply grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it all. Like Mary, she comes to recognize her true calling; and it is not as a surgeon, repairing broken bodies, but rather in pediatrics, bringing new life into the world and with it a deep sense of joy and hope in the midst of all the suffering and grief.

That's often how it goes you know. It may seem like God is inviting us to something new, when in fact it's not really an invitation at all, but simply an insight into what WILL be.

When that happens, some of us will be like Mary and open ourselves to the Spirit, and some will be like the surgeon, (or an array of other skeptical biblical characters) lacking the belief that we have the skill set to follow. We will need someone to take us by the arm. And we will need to listen to the wisdom of those who can provide support and guidance. Even Mary goes to her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant and has more life experience.

Either way, when God calls us to something new, it isn't about choosing to follow or not, but rather it is about capturing the vision and being compelled to follow. It's about recognizing that there is no choice to be made, it's simply a convergence of wills, God's and ours. It's about recognizing our call to work with God, not avoiding controversial issues, but bringing the light of Christ and the joy of the Spirit to bear on them, as we seek always for God's kingdom of justice and peace.

And now all of this has me wondering:

I wonder what new insights God is offering each of us.

I wonder how God is calling us to engage in God's vision.

And I wonder how each of us will respond.