

WGUMC December 9, 2012 "How can this be?"
Luke 1:26-35

I couldn't think of how to start the sermon, so Kristen and I wrote this poem Friday evening, driving home:

*I needed to write the sermon,
but I had to run the dog,
so I thought about the sermon
as I was running through the fog.
I got home to start the sermon,
then it was time to get the tree.
When I finally began to write the sermon,
Kristen reminded me,
I'd promised to get her some cocoa.
Guess I'll never get this done,
But sermons and life are like that:
Just one long interruption.*

Life is interruption, when you think about it. Has been from the very beginning. The Big Bang was one big interruption. Light broke into the darkness. Matter penetrated the emptiness. Billions of years later, life arose on the planet. And billions of years after that, you were born, and the universe has never been the same!

We forget that each one of us was an interruption from our very conception. So, no matter how annoying or unsettling, maybe life's interruptions aren't *all* bad. Ask Mary.

Mary was a young maid betrothed to a man named Joseph. So on that day she was preparing to be a wife. Maybe she was planning her wedding. Maybe she was cleaning house for company. I don't know, but I bet she was busy with something when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her without making an appointment, without asking if it were convenient. God has a way of doing that, just showing up.

Maybe life is interruption because God is interruption. After all, Moses is just minding his own business, tending sheep, when God shows up and calls him up to set his people free. Jacob, stressed out about going to meet his brother, is just trying to get some sleep when God shows up and says "put 'em up" and wrestles with him 'til daybreak. And Paul is just

walking down the street when God shows up and knocks him down so that he'll listen up and then look up and see...Jesus.

Last week, we talked about how to meet Jesus. And I said that first you have to want it to get it. That means that you have to live in expectation. But that doesn't mean that Jesus is going to accept your embossed invitation. I'm telling you that Jesus almost always shows up unannounced. And his arrival is going to feel like an interruption.

Poor Mary. Call her "virgin interrupted." When the Angel Gabriel tells her that she's going to have a child, she can't believe it. Nothing in her world of experience can make sense of it. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Exactly. While her question is intensely personal, it's also universal. She speaks for every one of us, for when it comes to dealings with God, we're all virgins. That's what I was thinking as I was pondering this passage on the labyrinth last week. There is so much God we don't know, so much truth we haven't encountered, so many

mysteries we haven't penetrated, so many joys we haven't felt, so much life we haven't lived.

When God comes to us, every time God comes to us, we are like Mary, virgins interrupted. It's like this: most of the time we just go along, making our usual mess of things, until one day the air feels a bit different, the light looks a little odd, we're caught slightly off-guard. And in that moment, we hold our breath just long enough to hear a word we don't understand. Or confront a truth we don't want to accept. We may be given a task we don't want to do. Or offered a deal we can't refuse. And we say, "How can this be? I'm not ready. I'm untried. I'm unqualified. I have no experience in this. So why would you trust me to live this new life when I've failed so miserably at my old one? How can this be?" O, the mystery.

It was my sophomore year in college. I was doing some last minute cramming for an organic chemistry mid-term. I had a few minutes before I had to climb the stairs to class, so I

stopped in the ladies room just off the study lounge. And, though I saw no angel and heard no voice, it was in that stall that I clearly received the call. Talk about an interruption. But I didn't have time to ponder it. I still had to take the exam. I finished the class. In fact, I took another semester of chemistry and finished out the year. That gave me, like Mary, about nine months to be perplexed and to ponder what sort of call this might be. I hadn't been happy in premed. I didn't much like chemistry, and I loved theology. But beyond that, the true meaning of my call escaped me. Most days, it still does.

That day, it certainly escaped Mary. What did she know of the Holy Spirit coming upon her, the Most High overshadowing her, the impossible becoming possible through her? Good thing she didn't know what she was saying, when she said, "Let it be with me according to your word."

If you're anything like me, it won't make much sense to you when Jesus comes to you. "How can this be since this is

beyond my experience of what is and what ever could be?" But remember what the angel said to Mary, "Nothing will be impossible with God." So to all you spiritual virgins out there, I say, do not be afraid. You don't need a womb to receive Jesus. You just need to create some space where the new life he wants to give you can grow, where you can ask new questions and head off in new directions, space where new dreams take shape and new hopes take hold. All you need is a place in your life where you have enough freedom and not so much fear that you can let go and let it be with you according to God's word.

News flash: We interrupt the regularly scheduled chaos that is your life to bring you the Christmas season. Oh I know what your life is like. I know how disrupted and fragmented and strung-out you often feel. But here comes Christmas: your chance to create a place where all those interruptions can become incarnations of God's grace. So, I challenge you to think of every interruption from now until Christmas as God's

Word trying to break into your world in some tangible way. It may not be as momentous as a pregnancy, but God's Word always comes with urgency.

A telemarketer calls you during dinner. Instead of hanging up on them, tell them that God is with them. I don't know if they'll thank you, but they probably won't call you again! Your dog gets sick all over your new carpet. That may be the only way to get you down on your knees this season. Pray your heart out once you get there. A Christmas gift doesn't arrive in time. Decide how *you* can be the best-est gift on your loved one's list. Your mother-in-law is coming for Christmas dinner. Try that new recipe on her. Serve her a big plate of forgiveness. You see, you can think of all these irritations as God just trying to get your attention. Call them divine interruptions.

This past week, I got an email from out of the blue. Someone who knows someone I know back in Marin wants to speak with me. Wants to talk theology! This person grew up in

the church, was active as an adult, but is wrestling with a lot of questions and now needs a deeper reason to keep believing.

It's a busy season, but I tell you that it's interruptions like this that give me a reason to keep living!

So what is interrupting you this season? How is the Holy Spirit coming upon you and the Most High overshadowing you? What is God up to with you? And how can this be...unless you let it be according to God's word?