

Advent 4, December 20, 2020

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Theme: Favor: "You Keep Using That Word. I Do Not Think It Means
What You Think It Means."

"The Princess Bride" is a favorite movie of mine. In the movie, the character Vizzini uses the word "inconceivable" whenever something happens that he did not expect to happen. After several utterances of this word, Inigo Montoya, the swordsman Vizzini has hired says, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." I think the same could be said by Mary at the angel's use of the words "favored one."

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'"

Favored? I can imagine Mary thinking like Montoya, I do not think that word means what you think it means. Mary was a virgin. She was betrothed to Joseph and had not lived with him as his wife. The only way she could be with child was if some kind of pre-marital

indiscretion had occurred. No. There was no favor here. This was disastrous! I can imagine Mary saying, "No thanks Lord. If this is your idea of favor, I'll gladly accept being an unnoticed and ignored peasant girl. NO THANKS!"

Have you ever felt like that in your walk with God? I know I have. There have been so many times when I thought I had all the pieces of life in order only to have God upset the apple cart and I did not feel very "favored." In fact, sometimes, being favored by God feels more like persecution than favoring! Sometimes, doing God's will is anything but favorable for us because people do not always like God's will to be done. We get laughed at and mocked for saying something is God's will, as though we live in a make-believe world where we justify whatever we want to do by saying it is God's will. I personally have been mocked and chastised many times this year because I have said that I will trust in God and keep the Church open during the pandemic. I believe that God is with us, and that he wants us to be in worship, so if we all die from the virus because we were worshipping God, that's okay with me. We leave this veil of tears and walk through the gates of heaven arm in arm together. So far, it has been God's will that not one person has contracted the virus from Trinity. All we can do is do his will and trust him to take care of the details.

Mary helps us with this conundrum. In the face of being an unwed mother in a time when that was unheard of in nice Jewish families, Mary says,

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” That was faith responding not human flesh. Our human nature is sinful and prideful. Human flesh is always looking out for what we think is in our best interest. It is always looking to get ahead, get on top, get one up on someone else. Human flesh always thinks the Word of God is optional and we, with our massive intelligence, know better. But faith, on the other hand, speaks God language. Faith knows that God’s plan is always the best plan even when it is not our plan. God’s plan will always bring greater joy, greater contentment and greater security. When God calls us into dangerous and uncomfortable waters, faith responds like Isaiah who said,

“Send me!” Faith responds like Mary, who said,

“Let it be according to your will.” Faith responds like Jesus, who said,

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” That is the prayer we pray in the Lord’s Prayer.

“Thy will be done,” we say and Luther reminds us in the meaning of that petition that it is not that we doubt that God’s will is always done, because, after all, he’s God. Rather what we are praying is that God would enlarge our faith to such an extent that we can accept his will, embrace his will, and do his will, believing that we are indeed favored people, even when it does not seem so by worldly standards.

God’s will is inconceivable, and unlike Vizinni in “The Princess Bride,” we do know what that word means. It means that we are too limited, too small to grasp anything as great as God’s will. So, we turn to his Word, our baptismal waters and the true body and blood of Christ to empower our faith so that while we will likely never understand his will, we are able to carry it out and know that in doing so, we will be blessed in ways which truly are inconceivable.

Jesus Christ knelt in that garden and prayed to God to take death on the cross and damnation to Hell away from him if there were any other way. But, if that is God’s way, he submitted himself to the Father’s will. Because he did, we were saved from sin, death and the power of the devil. We were made children of God. And because of that, we too are able to speak with Mary,

“Let it be according to your will.” We are favored, and God is with us to the very end of the age. Learn from Mary’s humility and

faith. We don't have the answers. We don't even know all the questions. Before we criticize others for how their handling something, and hold forth on what ought to be done or how something ought to be handled, take a heaping helping of humility from Mary who knelt in her chamber watching her whole life come unraveled. She turned to God in the midst of the unknown and said, "Let it be according to your will." She heard his words, that she was highly favored. We hear those words as well flowing from our baptisms. We, like Mary, are highly favored. We are in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Trust that God knows what is best for you, and whatever is happening in your world right now, trust that it will be amazing when God is through with you.