
Grace: Let It Be, Let Its Whisper Become a Song

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C

The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you... 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:28, 30-31, 35, 37-38)

"Let it be," said Mary. *Speaking words of wisdom, Let it be.*

About fifty-five years ago, there was a man whose business was failing. He was still a member of an amazing partnership—one of its two great stars, in fact—but he knew the partnership was crumbling. In fact, everyone in the business knew it.

The year was 1969. The partnership was the great rock band, The Beatles. The man was Paul McCartney. As he worried about the break-up of The Beatles, McCartney tried more and more desperately to take control of the band.

One night, Paul McCartney had a dream, a dream that featured his mother, his mother Mary. In the dream, his mother, who had died when was fourteen years old, came to him and said just a few words, "Let it be."

*When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me,
Speaking words of wisdom, Let it be.*

McCartney has said, since, that he did not intend the song to have any explicit religious meaning, but he has also allowed that people can interpret that song in any way they like, including the religious. And many of us do just that.

It is my belief that, in the church, today is Mother's Day. For one thing: the Sunday before Christmas is often a day when many children are back in town, and with their mothers! Plus: this season is often a time when people remember our deceased mothers.

I know that the rest of the country counts the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day, and we here in the church usually make a nod in that direction on the Second Sunday in May. But, in the Christian Church, we already have a Mother's Day, built into our lectionary, our schedule of Bible readings through the year.

It's today. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday before Christmas, the Church usually hears the faithful story of one of the great mothers of our tradition. Mary. Mother Mary. The one who heard the angel announce a miraculous conception. The one who received the Word. And, then, the one who said, "Let it be to me according to your word." The one who said, "Let it be."

Hail, Mary, some say today. *Full of grace. Blessed are you among women.* Many of us know that powerful prayer from the Roman Catholic tradition, and we say the prayer to Mother Mary, from our Anglican Catholic tradition! But we might well speak it to all mothers today. We hail mothers today, those who say yes, those who allow the miracle of new life to be conceived in them. Mothers, who whisper words of wisdom to those they love, especially in times of trouble. Mothers, who speak words of truth.

"Hail Mary" is also a Protestant Catholic declaration, because what we observe today is the power of the Word. It is the Word that comes upon Mary. It is a creating Word, aggressive, energetic Word.

It is the Word which fills Mary today, and it is the Word which fills us. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh.* And the Word fills us.

At some point in every mother's life, at some point in every father's life, at some point in every parent's life, they hear one of the most feared questions of parenthood. "Mommy, Daddy, where do babies come from?"

No matter how old the questioner is, there is always one answer that works. There is one correct answer for the question, "Where do babies come from?" They come from love. Babies come from love. When two people love each other, new life happens.

And the signs of that love are often words. Words are important. The way we speak to other people matters. The way we speak to our lovers matters. And, then, the love-words are fleshed out; good words become good flesh.

What did the Word say to Mary? The Word said, "Greetings! Favored One! The Lord is with you! Do not be afraid!"

The word "Greetings!" really means, "Rejoice!" It is one my favorite words in the Bible. The Word of God is always, at one level, a word of rejoicing. What if that were the first word we greeted folks with every day? "Rejoice!"

Ah, what if each of us called our lover, "favored one." "You have found favor," says the angel to Mary.

Then, says the Angel, "Do not fear." Indeed, that is what Love says in every generation. You need not fear. Perfect love casts out fear." When you find yourself in times of trouble, do not fear.

And Mary accepts this miracle, this sign of divine love, Mary accepts this Word, with her own words. She says "Let it be. Let it be to me according to your word."

Mary is not the only person in this story who accepts the Word of new life. The angel says that her "cousin, Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived." And, elsewhere in the Bible, the gospel of Matthew tells this story another way entirely, with the angel announcing the news not to Mary at all, but to Joseph.

It's not just Mary's day today. It's not just Mother's Day today. It's Father's Day, too. It's Cousin's Day. And Aunt's and Uncle's Day. It's Relative's Day. It is a day to welcome the power of grace into our lives, no matter who we are. It's All Flesh Day.

When the angel hailed Mary as favored one, the angel was announcing favor to *all* flesh. When Mary said "Let it be to me according to your word," the Word entered *all* flesh, even you and me, generations later. That word said, "You are favored. You are graced."

The mighty, inseminating, conceiving Word of God is always about grace. And there's not a person in the world who does not need it. Your child needs that word. Your spouse. Your lover. Your friend. Your stranger. Your other. Your enemy. The Annunciation is a word of grace. You are favored, and so are you and you and you!

Do not be afraid! *You* have found favor with God. The Holy Spirit has come upon *you* with grace.

The power of God's grace is that it makes us all feel like virgins. The power of grace is that every time is the first time. It is a new beginning every time it enters into us. It's like celebrating New Year's Day.

"Hail, favored ones! Rejoice, you have received grace."

What kind of blessing, what kind of grace, will we announce today? What kind of blessing will we speak tomorrow? It is what our children need. It is what our friends need. It is what our parents need.

It is what *we* need. And when we have received grace, it grows. The nature of grace is that it grows. The proof of grace is that it grows. The way others know you are pregnant with grace, is that it grows. It starts with a whisper, and it grows into a song.

Let it be. *Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.* That which is conceived in us is holy. It is grace. And it will be the salvation of all flesh.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*