

DATE: DECEMBER 1, 2014
SCRIPTURES: ROMANS 16:25-27; LUKE 1:26-38
TITLE: SMUGGLING GOD INTO THE WORLD

IT'S FOUR SHORT DAYS UNTIL CHRISTMAS.
FOUR DAYS TO
FINISH THE SHOPPING,
WRAP THE PRESENTS,
MAKE THE COOKIES,
DECORATE THE TREE,
MAIL THE CARDS.

WE ALL KNOW CHRISTMAS IS LIKE BABIES.
IT COMES
WHETHER WE ARE READY FOR IT OR NOT.
EVERY YEAR I FEAR
I WON'T BE READY.
IT'S A REASONABLE FEAR,
MORE REASONABLE THIS YEAR THAN MOST.

MY CARDS JUST WENT OUT YESTERDAY!
BUT, CHRISTMAS' COMING BEFORE I'M READY
ISN'T MY ONLY FEAR.
I FEAR MY MONEY WILL RUN OUT
BEFORE I FINISH SHOPPING.
EVEN MORE, I FEAR I WILL END UP
IN THE AFTER CHRISTMAS MAD HOUSE
RETURNING PRESENTS THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT
FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER.

I TELL MYSELF CHRISTMAS SHOULDN'T BE ABOUT FEAR.
AFTER ALL DOESN'T THE ANGEL GABRIELE
TELL MARY NOT TO FEAR?
THEN, I COME TO MY SENSES.
WHAT DOES GABRIEL KNOW?
MARY HAS EVERY REASON IN THE WORLD TO BE AFRAID.
SHE IS BARELY A TEENAGER,
NOT YET MARRIED TO JOSEPH,
WHEN GABRIELE COMES TO TELL HER
GOD HAS CHOSEN HER TO BEAR THE CHRIST CHILD.

AS IT WAS WITH EVERY WOMAN THEN,
MARY'S LIFE SCRIPT HAD BEEN WRITTEN
YEARS BEFORE SHE WAS BORN ~
MARRIAGE, HOME, CHILDREN,
IN THAT ORDER.

(KATHRYN MATTHEWS (HUEY), SERMON SEEDS, 12.21.14)
SHE EXPECTS TO BEGIN LIVING IT OUT
IN THE NOT SO DISTANT FUTURE.
BUT, GABRIELE'S UNEXPECTED VISIT
PRESENTS HER WITH A CHOICE,

WHICH COULD THROW HER LIFE INTO DISARRAY.
IF SHE CHOOSES TO BECOME JESUS' MOTHER,
SHE RISKS LOSING JOSEPH,
WHO WILL THINK SHE HAS NOT BEEN FAITHFUL,
THAT IS NOT ALL SHE RISKS, HOWEVER.
SHE ALSO RISKS LOSING HER LIFE,
BECAUSE IN HER DAY ADULTERY WAS PUNISHED BY STONING.
MARY HAS EVERY REASON TO BE AFRAID,
EVERY REASON TO SEND GABRIELE PACKING.
AMAZINGLY, SHE DECIDES “. . . TO TAKE HOLD OF
THE UNKNOWN LIFE GABRIELE HOLDS OUT TO HER.”
(BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR, SERMON SEEDS, P.).
SHE TELLS GABRIELE,
“HERE I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD;
LET IT BE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.”
WITH THOSE THREE LITTLE WORDS,
“LET IT BE,”
MARY “. . . AGREES TO ALLOW GOD
TO REARRANGE HER LIFE
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WORLD.”
(ASHLEY COOK CLEERE, “PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE,” FEASTING ON THE WORD, V. 4, P.)

IN HER SERMON ON THIS PASSAGE,
MY FAVORITE THEOLOGIAN AND PREACHER, BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR,
TELLS US,
“ IF WE SAY YES TO OUR LIVES,
(WE) CAN TAKE PART
IN THE THRILLING AND DANGEROUS SCHEME
WITH NO SCRIPT AND NO GUARANTEE.
WE CAN AGREE TO SMUGGLE GOD
INTO THE WORLD INSIDE OUR OWN BODY.”
I ABSOLUTELY LOVE THIS DESCRIPTION
OF BEARING GOD IN OUR BODIES!
I LOVE IT BECAUSE IT EMPHASIZES THE INHERENT RISK
IN SAYING, “LET IT BE,” TO GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATION.
THE RISK IS A FEARSOME THING.
FEARSOME, BECAUSE WE CAN'T CONTROL
OTHER PEOPLE'S RESPONSES TO US.
FEARSOME, BECAUSE
WE CANNOT SEE THE FUTURE,
SO WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE.
FEARSOME, BECAUSE WE QUESTION OUR FAITH AND COURAGE
AND WONDER IF WE WILL BE ABLE TO FINISH
WHAT WE STARTED.
FEARSOME, BECAUSE WE KNOW
THE WORLD CAN SOMETIMES BE A SCARY PLACE,
AND WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THE SCARY THINGS ARE.
YET, IF WE GRAB HOLD OF OUR LIFE,
IF WE ALLOW GOD'S HOPE FOR US

AND OUR LOVE FOR GOD TO EMPOWER AND GUIDE US,
WE CAN SAY AS MARY SAID,
“LET IT BE.”

WHEN WE DO,

WHAT A WONDERFUL, AMAZING, FULFILLING LIFE
WE HAVE!

IT’S A LIFE LIVED REVEALING GOD’S LOVE FOR THE WORLD.

THAT, MY FRIENDS, IS AN EXQUISITE BLESSING BOTH FOR THE WORLD AND US.

THROUGH THE YEARS,

I HAVE SEEN MANY, MANY PEOPLE
SMUGGLE GOD INTO THE WORLD IN THEIR BODIES.

IT HAPPENS IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED PLACES,

AT THE MOST UNEXPECTED TIMES.

EARLIER THIS MONTH AT HEB, THE MAN SACKING GROCERIES

FOR OUR FOOD PANTRY SMUGGLED GOD INTO MY WORLD
WHEN I ASKED HIS NAME.

THINKING HE SAID “ISIS,”

I SAID,

“YOU MUST BE RELUCTANT TO SHARE THAT NAME
WITH STRANGERS THESE DAYS.”

TAKING NO OFFENSE,

HE GENTLY CORRECTED ME SAYING,

“IT’S ISSA AND MEANS JESUS.”

AS WE WALKED TO MY CAR, I ASKED HOW HE HAD COME TO AUSTIN.

HE TOLD ME HE WAS FROM ALGERIA,

HAD TAUGHT HIGHER MATH THERE,

CALCULUS, STATISTICS, STATISTICAL INFERENCE.

HAD IMMIGRATED TO THE US SEEKING A BETTER LIFE,

BUT HIS LACK OF FLUENCY IN ENGLISH

HAD PREVENTED HIM GETTING A TEACHING JOB.

HIS GOAL WAS TO IMPROVE HIS ENGLISH

AND RETURN TO HIS PROFESSION.

AS HE FINISHED PUTTING THE GROCERIES IN MY CAR,

HE THANKED ME FOR TALKING WITH HIM.

I WAS BLOWN AWAY.

FROM THE MINUTE I ENGAGED HIM IN CONVERSATION,

ISSA REVEALED GOD’S GRACE TO ME

EVEN THOUGH I HAD UNWITTINGLY BEEN UNGRACIOUS TO HIM

IN THE BEGINNING.

IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS,

MANY OF YOU HAVE ALSO SMUGGLED GOD INTO MY WORLD.

LAST, SUNDAY EUGENIE SMUGGLED GOD

INTO THE CALLED SESSION MEETING

AS SHE TALKED ABOUT HER FAITH JOURNEY

AND WHAT HAD LED HER TO SEEK MEMBERSHIP HERE.

HER DESCRIPTION OF HPPC

AS A WARM, LOVING, AND HOSPITABLE CHURCH

MADE CHRIST VERY REAL TO ME.
ZACH SMUGGLED GOD INTO MY WORLD
AS HE HELD ONTO NIKO AND LOVED ON HIM
DURING THE CANTATA.
BEN, KAREN, DORIS, MICHELLE, AND JOE'S RESPONSE
TO A NEED HERE AT THE CHURCH
SMUGGLED GOD INTO MY WORLD.
APRIL AND THE CHOIR'S GIFT OF MUSIC SMUGGLED GOD INTO MY WORLD.

WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN GOD SMUGGLED INTO YOUR WORLD RECENTLY?
WHERE HAVE YOU SMUGGLED GOD INTO THE WORLD RECENTLY.
EVERY TIME SOMEONE SMUGGLES GOD INTO OUR WORLD,
THE WORLD BECOMES MORE LIKE GOD HOPES IT WILL BE ~
MORE JUST,
MORE PEACEFUL,
MORE RIGHTEOUS
EVERY TIME WE SMUGGLE GOD INTO THE WORLD,
WE BECOME MORE LIKE GOD HOPES WE WILL BE ~
MORE RESPECTFUL.
MORE ACCEPTING AND WELCOMING.
MORE LOVING AND COMPASSIONATE.
WHENEVER THIS HAPPENS,
WE BIRTH LIFE AND BEAUTY IN THE WORLD.

RECENTLY, I HAVE BEEN WONDERING
IF WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO GET CAUGHT UP
IN THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF THE SEASON
TO AVOID THINKING ABOUT
THE SEASON'S MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY.
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY OF THE SEASON?
SMUGGLING GOD INTO THE WORLD IN OUR BODIES.
ALLOWING CHRIST TO BE BORN IN US.
ALTHOUGH WE MAY NOT REALIZE IT,
OUR FRANTIC ACTIVITY
DIVERTS OUR ATTENTION FROM THE WORK
OF OUR BECOMING.
MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, WE EMBRACE THE FRANTIC ACTIVITY,
BECAUSE WE UNCONSCIOUSLY PERCEIVE
THE INHERENT RISK OF THE WORK.
IF WE WILL SLOW DOWN AND GET QUIET,
WE MIGHT HEAR GABRIELE SPEAKING TO US, SAYING,
"FEAR NOT, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD
AND YOU WILL BEAR A SON AND HIS NAME IS JESUS,
FOR NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD."
HEARING, WE MIGHT BEGIN TO
"MAKE OUR HOUSE AS FAIR AS WE ARE ABLE,
TRIM THE HEARTH AND SET THE TABLE."
LOVE THE GUEST **IS** ON THE WAY.
ALREADY, HE IS KNOCKING ON THE DOOR OF OUR HEARTS,

PATIENTLY WAITING FOR US
TO INVITE HIM IN,
HOPING OUR RESPONSE WILL BE,
“LET IT BE.”
FOR NOTHING, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING,
IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD. AMEN.