

## The Gift of Mary's Yes!: Luke 1:26-38

Norwalk Christian Church, December 1, 2019, Advent 1, Non-lectionary, Year a

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It was 50 years ago next April, when the world was changed by a song. The songwriter explains the story behind the song: "I was going through a really difficult time. It was late in the Beatles' career and...I was sensing the Beatles were breaking up, so I was staying up late at night, drinking, doing drugs, clubbing, the way a lot of people were at the time. I was really living and playing hard."<sup>1</sup>

"The other guys were all living out in the country with their partners, but I was still a bachelor in London...So, I was exhausted!"

That's when Paul McCartney had a dream that led to a song. "Somewhere between deep sleep and insomnia," he says, "I had the most comforting dream about my mother, who died when I was only 14. She had been a nurse, my mum, and very hardworking, because she wanted the best for us... At night when she came home, she would cook, so we didn't have a lot of time with each other. But she was just a very comforting presence in my life. And when she died, one of the difficulties I had, as the years went by, was that I couldn't recall her face so easily..."

"So in this dream twelve years later, my mother appeared, and there was her face, completely clear, particularly her eyes, and she said to me very gently, very reassuringly: 'Let it be.'"

"It was lovely. I woke up with a great feeling. It was really like she had visited me at this very difficult point in my life and gave me this message: Be gentle, don't fight things, just try and go with the flow and it will all work out.

"So, being a musician, I went right over to the piano and started writing a song: 'When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me'... Mary was my mother's name... 'Speaking words of wisdom, let it be... There will be an answer, let it be... When all the broken-hearted people living in the world agree, there will be an answer, let it be.'"

"Not very long after the dream, I got together with Linda, which was the saving of me. And it was as if my mum had sent her, you could say.

"These days," Paul says, "the song has become almost like a hymn...people used to lean out of cars and trucks and say, 'Yo, Paul, let it be.' So those words are really very special to me, because not only did my mum come to me in a dream and reassure me with them at a very difficult time in my life – and sure enough, things did get better after that – but also, in putting them into a song...it became a comforting, healing statement for other people too."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mattandjojang.wordpress.com/2009/05/03/the-story-behind-paul-mccartneys-song-let-it-be/>

Let it be. Those words changed the music world. Those words have been changing the world for sometime now. There's something about that affirmation, about saying yes, when faced with an opportunity or challenge--or simply the chance to live and fight another day--that changes you.

The Advent story begins with those words, "Let it be...Let it be to me according to your word." Words spoken by another Mother Mary, a woman who had ever reason to say, "No way, no how."

One night, *she* had a dream. The angel Gabriel whooshes into her room, and offers her an opportunity. "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. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High."

We know the back story. Tradition tells us that she was young--her whole life ahead of her. She was betrothed to an older man, Joseph. She was simple, poor, a Jewish girl in a small, forgotten village. Oh, and she was a virgin.

"How can this be," she asks her angelic visitor, "since I am a virgin?" *How can this be?*

And the angel responds with six startling words: "Nothing will be impossible with God."

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Six startling words: that's all it took to change Shonda Rhimes' life.<sup>2</sup> She writes about it in her memoir, *Year of Yes*. It was Thanksgiving 2013. Shonda is the youngest of six children, none of whom, she says is very impressed with her fame. Rhimes is the creator of shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*, a prolific television producer who has paved the way for women of color in the industry.

But to her family, she's the baby. Every so often, she writes, she tries to fish out some praise, to humble brag enough to get them to be impressed with all she has accomplished. But it's yet to happen. That's what she was doing that Thanksgiving.

She was preparing the meal with her oldest sibling, Delorse, 12 years older than she was, and she was talking on and on about all the invitations that she had been received lately. Honors and speaking engagements and high profile events--she expected her sister to stop stuffing the turkey and say, "That is so impressive!"

But instead, her sister pauses, looks at her, and asks, "Are you going to do any of those things?" Shonda says she was a little taken aback. I think you missed the point, she thinks. It's not about doing them, it's that I COULD do them. All these opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Year-Yes-Dance-Stand-Person/dp/1476777128>

That's when Shonda starts giving excuses. I mean, how could I? I'm busy. With work--three TV shows at once!--two little kids, I'm a single mother--I have a lot to do. Too much to do.

Delorse listens to her excuses, then returns to cutting up onions, and mutters six words: *"You never say yes to anything."*

Six startling words that, Shonda says, her sister just tosses out there like a grenade. Shonda writes, "That's the beginning. That's the origin of it all. My sister Delorse said six startling words and now I have become a different person."

The rest of her book journals the life-change she experienced the following year after that Thanksgiving, when she learned to start saying yes: to help, to opportunities, to herself and her own power.

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This morning is a beginning for us. For Christians, Advent begins a new year. The calendar won't change for 31 more days, but our liturgical clocks reset as we enter again into this story. We will sing the familiar songs, light the candles, and hear that ancient story--and everything will change. Or, will it?

The first Sunday of Advent is always my favorite. If you haven't noticed for the last 6 Advents we've spent together, I always pick out "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and, as we will sing in a moment, "Come O Long Expected Jesus." They're two of my favorite, the most Advent-y of all the songs in our hymnal, that speak of longing and expectation--of hope.

Hope that Christ will come again. Hope that the world will change. Hope that, this time, this year, everything will change. The songs are always the same, but the stories we read on this Sunday will vary.

It seems odd starting with Mary. Her story is often towards the end of our celebration--often reserved for Christmas Eve. But this year, we start here, with her--the holy mother. Maybe her story is the one we need to hear most this Advent.

Without her story, the rest wouldn't be here. The season, the songs, the candles, the stories--none of it. But because she said, "Let it be to me according to your word," because she said, yes...Everything changed.

But will it happen again?

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We can hear Paul McCartney's story of a dream that changed his life, his own mother Mary whispering, "Let it be," that woke him up, gave him hope, and prepared him for the next stage in life.

Or we can hear Shonda Rhimes' story, of saying yes after always saying no.

Perhaps you're already thinking about your own story, all the times you've been asked to do something: to lead that committee, to help with that project, to join that church or coach that team, or go on that trip, or take that class, or help in that way.

Maybe you have that go-to list of excuses: How can this be, Mother Mary whispered, and we know her words well: How can this be, for I am too old, too young, too inexperienced, too busy, too tired--how can this be?

There are a thousand reasons to say, "No." But how many reasons are there to say, "Yes!"?

Mary didn't have to say, Yes. Come back again in a few years, she could've said. It's really a great opportunity, but I'm just not ready. Not yet. Not now. She didn't have to say, Yes. But she did.

With Advent, the season changes. But what else will change?  
Well, that depends on our answer.

The 13th century mystic Meister Eckard, once said, "We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born." Who knows? Maybe Gabriel is still whooshing into people's dreams, offering the chance to bring God into our world.

Everyone of us--mothers of God.  
Everyone of us--given an opportunity. The chance of a lifetime.  
*How will we respond?*  
Which six unexpected words will be spoken:  
*You never say yes to anything. Or...*  
*Nothing will be impossible with God.*

Mary, faced with her invitation to be a mother of God, said, "Yes!"  
And everything changed.

`122God is always waiting to bring about the impossible. What will our answer be?