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Sermon for Sunday, December 18, 2011

Sermon Texts: II Samuel 7: 8-16
Luke 1: 26-38
Romans 16: 25-27

Sermon Title: "Finding God in unlikely places"

Sermon Topic: Advent 4 – Year B

Sermon Purpose: Perceiving God's Presence and Answering the Call

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Sermon Prayer: Creator and Provider, we come before you amid the hectic preparations to celebrate the birth of your Son, our Lord. Help us to clear our minds and open our hearts that we might truly receive him and respond to you in love and gratitude. Amen.

The story of the Annunciation presents a picture of one who was totally open to the presence and call of the Lord. We can only imagine the situation depicted by Luke. Most probably Mary, like all her contemporaries, had plans for her future. The scriptures tell us she was betrothed (engaged) to Joseph, a good and righteous man, a respected man with skills and a trade, a carpenter. She must have believed that her future would be rather ordinary and even mundane. She and Joseph would marry, raise a family, and do their best to follow the Law of Moses; just like their ancestors in the faith had done for many generations. Then, literally in the blink of an eye, her whole life changed, although she hardly understood what the angel's invitation and her acceptance would mean. In an instant, Mary was forced to make a life-changing decision. Her question to the angel about this miraculous invitation to be the Mother of God was natural. Yet, while she hardly could have completely understood what the angel was saying, Mary had sufficient faith to respond without hesitation, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary did not question her worthiness, the cost of her decision or challenge the angel's invitation. On the contrary, her faith was so great that she went forward, regardless of the uncertainty, recognizing the presence of God and answering the Lord's call.

Like Mary, we need to be open to the presence of the Lord and to God's call. We cannot fulfill our basic vocation to holiness without possessing a radical openness to God. We must be open to God when we feel inadequate. Created in the image and likeness of God we are, nonetheless, broken and incomplete. We are sinners. This is the common condition for all, and none of us is truly adequate. And so God accepts us for who we are. As the scriptures indicate in more than one place, God chooses those who perceive themselves unworthy to do the Lord's work. But remember what Paul says, "God chose what was weak in the world to shame the strong."¹

We must also recognize God's presence and answer the call when we feel inadequate or don't feel we have the time. We live in a terribly busy world; our responsibilities and the demands on our time always seem to keep growing greater. God's call can seem to be an interruption, a detour away from our daily, and lifelong, goals. Yet, it's through our openness to God and the consequent need to change that our greatest opportunities and growth are found. We can't say, "yes" to every person and need, but we must never discount God's call. We must give it serious reflection and consideration.

¹ I Corinthians 1: 27



Yes, God is present all around us, but do we perceive God's presence? This is an important question to ponder, especially as we await Jesus' birth. God is certainly present in events. The Lord is present in the birth of a child with all its wonder and beauty. God is present in the birth of nations, when tyranny falls and more democratic forms of government rise. God is present in the birth of ideas that allow people to take greater command of a situation and determine better ways to solve difficult issues. God is present in nature. God can be found in the birth of new lands created by volcanoes, earthquakes, and other natural phenomena. God is found in the terror of a hurricane-force wind and in the gentleness of a cool summer breeze. God is present in the dawn of each morning and the dusk of each evening.

We know that God is present in events and nature, but God is **most profoundly** present in **people**. God is present in us and in those we encounter each day. So, when **we** smile, **God** smiles. When we say a cheery "Good morning," God says "Good morning." When we take the time to be present with another and be of assistance, it is God who gives assistance. God's closeness tells us that we must do our best to be an appropriate container for the presence of God in our world.

Let's realize that we don't need to be great or be attractive to catch God's attention. No, all that's necessary is that we be open to God's presence and perceive God's action in the world. If we can, then certainly God will bend down, and touch us. And on Christmas Day, we will blossom forth to produce an abundance for God and all God's people.

Amen.

