

Joining in Mary's Story through Uncovering Your Vocation - Luke 1:26-38, 46-55

We each have a unique vocation, a purpose that goes beyond ourselves and helps to continue the Divine's unfolding in the world. The word vocation can be defined as a type of work that you feel you are suited to do, and to which you give all your time and energy. Your vocation could end up being your job, or it could be a hobby or a passion, or even a role you play within your relationships or community. Whatever expression your vocation takes is your unique offering. So, one way to uncover your vocation is to consider: What do you do without anyone asking you or paying you or even noticing? Or as theologian Frederick Büchner famously said: "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep needs."

So, you can consider: what brings you a sense of fulfillment and joy even when it is challenging or difficult? And isn't it interesting that you are still driven to do those hard things? Something in you is responding to a bigger need.

Another theologian Howard Thurman said: "Don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

So you can consider: what makes you come alive?

All of these definitions—work you feel aligned to, where you naturally invest your time and energy, what brings you fulfillment and resonates with something needed in the world, and what sparks the divine light inside of you, all of these begin with who God created you to be.

Vocation begins with knowing that you are loved, seen, cherished, and called to embody Christ's presence in the world through your ordinary life.

When I was discerning my vocation to the priesthood, I sensed that God was inviting me into something bigger than myself, and the work and role seemed to be a natural unfolding of who I already was. But this still required a period of

discernment where I had to let my call form in me over a period of time, so that I could more fully embody Christ's presence in myself, readying me to share it with others. During this time of discernment, I looked to Mother Mary to give me courage and guidance in how to faithfully nurture and birth a calling.

Let's look together at her story...

There was a young Jewish girl named Mary who lived in an unremarkable town called Nazareth. She lived an ordinary life and wasn't really known for anything noteworthy. But one day something truly remarkable happened to her. An angel of the Lord appeared in the quietness and privacy of her room and said that she was favored by God. She had been selected to nurture and carry Christ's presence in her own body. This ordinary girl had been chosen for this sacred task, instead of someone important like a queen. And this long awaited Messiah would be arriving as a vulnerable baby instead of a mighty king, as so many had expected.

Mary was afraid and asked questions, but in the end answered "yes", and her fear made way for joy. She broke out into song, rejoicing that through the Divine Incarnation that she was bringing into the world in the person of Jesus.

God remembers every promise and never fails to restore equality and justice so that everyone is standing on level ground, and everyone has what they need to thrive. Over the next 9 months, Mary pondered all these seemingly impossible things in the quietness of her heart. While Jesus physically grew inside of her, Mary underwent her own inner transformation. Christ's divine light was coming to fullness within her womb, and it was inevitably changing her in the process, too. She was being prepared for her life's vocation of being Jesus' mother.

This time of preparation was necessary, as Mary's calling was not going to be easy. It would include the deepest grief of losing a child. But she would carry her call out faithfully and admirably. And

even after mothering Jesus from infancy to death, she would continue to be her own embodiment of Christ's light, and through her faithfulness, she would become a blessing to every future generation.

Mary's story shows us how, before anything we do, God sees and delights in us as ordinary people. Even in our seemingly unremarkable lives, God meets us right where we are, to call us into the Divine's miraculous unfolding. And like Mary, we are each called to nurture and carry Christ's presence in our own selves, souls and bodies, letting it grow to fullness within us, so we can birth Christ's light into the world in our own time and place and situation. Mary can give us the confidence to say "yes" to this miraculous work even when this feels scary and risky and impossible, knowing that our "yes" has implications far beyond ourselves.

God's miraculous work in your life could unfold in the vocation of parenting your own child, or of nurturing other children in your life. It could be the vocation of singing in the choir or serving in the church. It could be meeting others' tangible needs through your day job, or your compassionate listening, your gardening, or teaching or dancing. Whatever your vocation, it is your unique offering, the expression of you coming fully alive, the spark of divine light that is lighting up the world.

So, may you have the courage to follow Mary's example by saying yes to God's work in your life, even when it is uncertain, scary, or seemingly impossible. May you have Mary's contemplative heart, so that you can notice all that God is doing in you, enabling you to undergo your own inner transformation. May you have Mary's devotion, so that you can nurture Christ's presence within you, and let it grow to fullness, impacting the world around you. And may you receive the many gifts of Mary's faithfulness that has birthed Christ's presence into the world allowing all people to thrive, and to live their lives to the fullest, even to our generation and to those that follow.

Amen.