

Christmas 2014

Let me tell you something that I learned this year.
The mass of the human body, both mine and yours, is 93% stardust.
You heard me right...93% stardust.
Remains of old stars.
Basically, we are intergalactic dust bunnies.
Walking trans-global dirt.

I'll tell you something else I learned.
Humans have 99% of the exact same DNA as monkeys.
Well, that certainly explains the behavior of some of my friends.

I'll tell you something else that I learned.
Last month, we landed a spaceship on an asteroid near Jupiter.
It bounced twice, but we got her down.
Simply amazing. And I get lost just driving around Duluth.

You know, sometimes I feel pretty small.
Insignificant.
Like, I don't matter.

Sometimes, I get weighed down...burdened.
And nobody notices...and the world just goes on as normal.
Part of me feels like...I'm left on the side of the road...
Road kill on the highway of life.

There are so many things I cannot change.
I cannot change the consumerism mentality of our culture...some of which takes over the Christmas season.
I cannot change what other people think and feel.
Sometimes, it seems...I cannot even change myself.
I get trapped in my routines...my perspectives...my blind spots...my addictions...
my set ways of behaving and thinking and feeling. I cannot change.
Sometimes I feel pretty small.
And you want to talk with me about standing before the grandeur of God?
Don't even get me going on being small before God. Oh...too late!

God is beyond us...bigger than we are...around us and above us and below us...
beyond any name we can name...or idea we can think...or image we can imagine.
God is not limited by any of our limitations.

God is transcendent, God whom we call Creator, or Father, or Yahweh, or Being
— or just plain “God,” which is not really even a name but a title, “God,”
because the Transcendent is beyond all names.

You live in a universe God created that is so big you cannot fathom it.

You live in a created order so amazingly complex and interwoven that you
understand only a millimeter of it.

You live in a world that is ginormous...and you are small.

So I say tonight, thank God for Mother Mary.

I mean it...thank God for Mary in our Christmas story.

She was as insignificant as they come.

On the social scale of the ancient Roman Empire, she was hardly a one.

She was female.

She lived in the region of Galilee, the north country, an irrelevant corner of the
world, that caused Nathaniel to comment, “Can anything good come out of
Nazareth?”

She was Jewish...she was young...she was engaged to a carpenter.

In her day, she didn't count, by any standard you could name.

I get Mary. She was small.

She reminds me of me...and you.

To this small one, who mattered not at all to the world, God comes.

The transcendent one yoked to Mary.

We heard the story last Sunday from Luke, chapter 1.

God spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel:

“Greetings, favored one.

The Lord is with you.

You have found favor with God.

You will conceive and bear a son...and name him Jesus.”

Mary responded to this announcement with “How can this be?”

But see, God wouldn't allow her to dismiss it.

God wouldn't allow her to negate it.

The angel said, “This is how it's going to be.

God has made it so. Nothing is impossible with God.”

I am convinced that God has spoken this not only to Mary...but also to you.

I believe that God has favored you.

God has acted to include you among God's people.

God has forgiven/saved/blessed/gifted you.

Don't dismiss it by saying: What? Who, me? No way!

Yes. You. Way.

Don't discount it by saying: I'm too young. I'm too old. I'm too poor. I don't have enough faith.

Don't push away the love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace God has shown you.

Don't reject what God already has done for you. Yes...for you.

How did Mary say it for all of us?

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your Word."

Thank you for Mary...for her model of faith and discipleship...for her witness to the glory of God.

I wonder...what God wants you to birth into the world.

I wonder...what difference God is making through you.

I wonder...what values and truths God is revealing through you.

I wonder...what God's plans are for your contribution to the common good?

I wonder...when the message from God can break through to you:

"Greetings, favored one. The Lord...is with you."

This Christmas Eve, we hear the birth story of Jesus, in Luke, chapter two.

As I hear it tonight, I am drawn to Mary.

Can you imagine all those big happenings that night:

Giving birth to a baby for the very first time...

In a place far from home...

An angel appearing to shepherds, shining with the glory of God...

A God announcement that the Savior of the world had been born...

A choir of angels singing the praises of God...

The shepherds journeying to Bethlehem and telling Mary about all these things.

All this amazing, incredible, godly stuff happening.

Listen to Mary's reaction to all of this in Luke's Gospel:

"Mary treasured all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Wow.

To treasure means...to hold in great value...to esteem as most important...

To appreciate and love.

That was Mary's heart. To treasure all these things.

Finally, that's what you can do when you are the little one...
And God is the big one.
You can treasure these things in your heart.
When you are insignificant by worldly standards...
You can treasure God being born as your Savior.
When you live in a quiet corner of the world...
You can treasure how God chose the humblest and the lowliest
to make known the greatest.
And all of this because of God's grace and love for you.
Unto you is born a Savior.

If Christmas is anything, it is sitting with Mary.
It is treasuring the greatest story ever told...
The greatest gift ever given...
The greatest treasure there is...
God with us.
Emmanuel.
The Word made flesh.
Jesus the Savior.
Ponder that.
Treasure that in your heart.

Thanks be to God.