

Let It Be

Sermon by Rev. Patty Farr
Based on Luke 1:26-38
December 24, 2017
Christmas Eve Morning Worship

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Most of us who grew up in the turbulent 60s and 70s can remember a song called "Let It Be" by the Beatles. The words poignantly describe the feeling of being troubled and completely overwhelmed, and then suddenly becoming aware of a mysterious presence, the presence of Mother Mary, coming and whispering words of wisdom, "Let it be, let it be..." Listen to the words of the opening verse: "When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be. And in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be..."

I always felt this song was hauntingly beautiful; it soothed and comforted me in an era of deep stress and sorrow. It served as a kind of spiritual hymn for all of the disillusioned young people of my generation who were living through the raging Vietnam War years and who had become disenchanted with the answers of politicians and other adults beyond the range of the draft. Many of us in those days were not spending very much time in church or thinking about God or Jesus or his mother Mary. Probably not too many realized that Paul McCartney took the title of his song directly from words of scripture: "Let it be" comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verse 38, as you heard this morning - the words Mary spoke to the angel Gabriel: "Let it be with me according to your word." But what was happening in Mary's life that she felt led to speak such words?

As far as we know, Mary was a simple, illiterate, Galilean peasant-girl in her late teens, living in a country occupied by Rome. Her plans for her future probably didn't extend much farther than the boundaries of Nazareth where she had grown up. Mary probably thought that, like her parents before her, she would marry early and spend her days keeping house and raising a family quietly and unremarkably in the village of Nazareth.

Instead, something entirely unexpected burst upon the scene, in the form of an angel, Gabriel. Probably the last thing this young peasant girl was imagining was an encounter with an angel! Yet this teenager, Mary, was invited by Gabriel to take part in a plan carefully designed for her by God, a wondrous plan which, if she agreed, would be part of God's great design to save and heal the broken people of the earth. Mary was asked out of

her own free will to interrupt her own plans for her life in order to become the mother of Jesus.

When was the last time you were given a surprise that changed the course of your life? What unexpected twist or turn of fate intruded into your life and slightly *or not so slightly* altered your carefully laid plans? For Mary it was an unexpected pregnancy. What has it been for you? Maybe a sudden change in your finances, the loss of your job, an illness, a move, the death of a loved one, or a painful parting? What unplanned event has entered uninvited into your life? And more importantly, how have you been handling it? Have you seen it as a tragedy, a disaster, or have you dared to see in it the possibility that God is doing something new in your life?

I remember such an experience when I was a junior in high school. My close friend Jodie came to me in tears one day, revealing that she thought she was pregnant. Jodie had always been a little wild, so while this news didn't exactly shock me, it did send me into a panic, knowing this pregnancy would alter her life forever and possibly not in a good way. The next few weeks were spent in great distress as we secretly plotted out her future in hushed tones over the phone late into the night, strategizing the first great hurdle of how to talk to her parents, who happened to be quite uptight and rigid and who we thought would never be able to deal with this situation. Jodie and I felt sure the world was about to come to an end any minute, and neither of us felt capable of handling it. I remember praying feverishly every night to God for a miracle to happen, and my idea of a miracle was for the whole problem to go away like some bad dream!

Finally, on the way to the bus one cold morning in January, Jodie said to me something very similar to the words spoken by Mary: "I might as well give in to it, Patty, it's not going to go away." My friend had decided to surrender to her situation. That night she found the courage to go to her mother, confess the problem, and then found to her surprise that her mother was much more understanding than could have been expected! Then, a week later, nature took its own course and Jodie called to tell me with tears of relief that she wasn't pregnant after all. But as a result of her having gone to her mother with the problem, she and her mother began to develop a much stronger relationship than they had ever had before. This allowed them to draw closer in the years ahead, learning to lean on each other and rely on each other through other difficulties that came along in their family's life in the years that followed.

As a teenager myself, sweating this thing out with my friend, and then seeing it resolve with some hidden blessings mixed in, I began to see how God makes use even of our mistakes to bring us to maturity. And I gained a deeper understanding of the meaning of "Let it be." Sometimes you can say those words to mean, "Leave it alone," or "Don't worry about it." But when my friend Jodie said it, she meant, "I'm ready to face whatever is going to happen." This is what Mary of Nazareth meant, too. "Let it be" in Mary's case meant: "Let it rip...let things come out the way you want them to, God. Though it may frighten me out of my wits, though the very idea of following your plan for my life may

completely blow my mind, let it be with me as you want it to be, for I trust that you love me, God, and you want only the very best for me."

When it comes down to it, only God knows what's really best for any of us, what our destiny is, what our full potential is, and what exact steps we need to take in order to reach it. So we need to "let it be" according to God's plan, instead of constantly trying to devise our own shaky schemes. In my friend Jodie's case, this meant finally talking to her mother about a problem that was much bigger than she could handle alone, and to this day Jodie and her mother have a deep and trusting friendship.

As a follower of Christ, you have been learning to rely on your faith that God is in charge not only of the universe, but of every aspect of your own life as well...your free time, your relationships, your health, your body, your money, your job, your life, your death, and the world around you? How do you feel about that? If you're like me, you may be slightly uncomfortable with the idea. But the truth is, God *is* in charge, *thank God!* No one knows or loves you better than God. So the sooner we decide to align ourselves with God's plan for our lives, no matter how inconvenient, frightening, or seemingly impossible, the sooner we realize that God's plan is actually the *only* plan that will take us all the way home, where at last we will become the people we know deep down we were meant to be.

This was Mary's experience. She could not fully comprehend how God was going to pull off this strange thing that the angel Gabriel said would happen: that she, an ordinary peasant girl, was somehow going to become mother of the savior of the world. How COULD she understand that? But she trusted. She said, "Let it be."

How would your life change if starting today, you said, "Let it be?" What if, in the most perplexing and difficult issue facing you right now, instead of struggling and beating your head against the wall, you just decided to say, "Let it be, God, let it turn out the way you see fit."

This Christmas a teenaged girl named Mary has come upon the scene to become our wisest teacher. She has a simple message. She says, "Let it be." Mary's "Let it be" says, "Let go of all that you've been trying to control but that you can never really control." Mary's "let it be" suggests that we put everything that is larger than ourselves into God's hands - not just a few things, but everything. We are not in charge, and neither is anyone else in this world; only God has the power and the wisdom to be in command of our lives and our universe.

No less than Mary, we each have a destiny to fulfill. At this juncture in the road, God has determined that it is time for Ron and me, as your co-pastors, to depart from this beloved place and set out on a new journey. In the same way, God has determined that it is time for you and your family of faith at Emmanuel Church to forge ahead into an unknown but fully blessed future full of promise and miracles. No less than Mary, God has called you to be here at Emmanuel, and God has called Ron and me to travel a different road, yet all

of us will continue to be united by our faith, our hope, our love. God's beautiful plan will be delayed and obstructed if we say to God, "I can't" or "I won't" or "I'm too afraid" or "I'm too young" or "I'm too old" or "I'm not smart enough" or "I'm not strong enough" or "I'm not good enough" or "Let somebody else do it" or "Not now." God knows who we each are and what we each are capable of, and God is saying, "Yes, now!"

So today, on the day before Christmas, isn't it the perfect time to open your heart to this God who loves you more than life itself, and whisper words of wisdom, "Let it be..."

Let us pray. O God, thank you for the messages of angels, thank you for Mary, thank you for her whispered words of wisdom and comfort, "Let it be." Amen.