

Plan B – Love  
Texts: Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38  
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – December 20, 2020  
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We begin this morning with the verses just before our Scripture text from last Sunday, with Mary being visited by the angel, Gabriel. She is given the news that she has been chosen by God to give birth to the long-awaited Savior and Messiah of the world. “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary is greatly troubled at this greeting from Gabriel – that she is highly favored – that the Lord is with her. What is going on?, wonders the young teenager.

How is it that Mary is highly favored and God’s presence is with her? She had not done anything extraordinary in her 12 or 13 years to earn the right and privilege of bearing the Savior. It was simply God’s favor – God’s grace – on her. This favor with God is an example of God’s unconditional agape’ love – nothing that Mary has said or done has earned it – she is not entitled to it. God has just found His favor with her. The unconditional love and grace of a Heavenly Father who cares for His children.

If you are a parent, then you know about this kind of love. We may get upset and disappointed with our kids – there may be times they make choices that we do not agree with or that are harmful to them, but our love for them does not stop. Or maybe you have felt love like this from your own parents – I hope that you have. That even though you may have messed up as a child or teenager, you always knew that your parents had your back – they would be there to support you, help you pick up the pieces. It is a love like no other. This is the kind of love and favor God has for us.

What can God’s favor – God’s grace and unconditional love do for us on this Fourth Sunday of Advent at the end of a tumultuous year? Look around. There is so much hate and

anger around us. There are so many people who are in need of this kind of love – who maybe have never experienced this kind of love. We can offer them grace, favor undeserved, God’s agape’ love.

In Mary’s day, God knew that the Israelites could not do this on their own. They had failed miserably – over and over. Plan B, then, for God was to extend His love by sending Jesus as their Savior. In the same way, we cannot do it. We need God’s love and favor – desperately. We need to experience and feel God’s grace working in and through us so that we might be in a position to love others the way God desires that we do. What we need right now with all that is going on in our world – the pandemic, stress all around, a divided country – is love. God’s favor. God’s grace.

As Mary faces her feelings of being troubled and confused at the angel’s greeting, Gabriel goes on, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” Do not be afraid, Mary. Well, what on earth would Mary be afraid of in that moment? Of course, Mary would be afraid. We talked last week about all the scrutiny and judgment that Mary and Joseph would face being an unmarried couple expecting a baby. She might be afraid of that. But I also think that the angels next words would be even more terrifying. This baby that she will conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit will be “great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” Say what? Do not be afraid, Mary. Okay. Sure.

Fear is something, is it not? It causes us to react in many different ways. Sometimes it makes us retreat, and other times, we lash out and strike when we are afraid. Still at other times, we stop living life because we are paralyzed by our fear. Fear sometimes makes us question

everything in life. It seems to me that all of these were options on the table for Mary. She could have reacted in any of these ways out of her fear for what was to come. But love – plan B.

I John 4, verse 18 says this, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” Fear causes us to react in ways that are not good for us. Where there is fear, there cannot be love. Love, though, helps us to respond in a way that encompasses Jesus Christ. We cannot have love with fear. So, when we respond to others – to trials – to the unknown, can we respond in love and not fear?

The Reverend Dr. Janet Hunt, pastor at First Lutheran Church in DeKalb, Illinois, writes this, “I don't know how one becomes 'unafraid' in the face of what should otherwise terrify us. We do not hear, of course, that Mary was ever actually afraid. Even so, it seems to me, she must have been. Young, unmarried, and pregnant as she was in that time and place, Mary had every reason to be afraid. But Mary, along with all those others who have heard the Angel's urging to leave fear behind apparently did just that. She did just that as she heard God's own call to something more than what she could possibly have imagined all on her own...

And so it is that I imagine this to be our call in these last days of Advent. You and I are to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open for the certain truth that fear has no place among us whom the Angel Gabriel has visited. At least not fear that keeps us from being about what we are called to be about.

I have to admit, I'm not there yet, of course. I am sometimes still afraid and so I do still need to hear the Angel's Announcement. But there is this. I'm working hard to see the signs of a time when fear will no longer hold sway. And I am encouraged by the witness of those who don't let even reasonable fear stand in the way of doing what needs to be done. Not even in the most fearful of places. Where in your life do you most need to hear the Angel's Announcement "Do

not be afraid!" ? When have you heard that announcement and believed it and moved ahead in spite of the fear? Where in the world have you encountered people who heard this announcement? Where would you most like to speak the words 'Do not be afraid' and be believed?" (From Internet. [words.dancingwiththeword.com/2014/12/do-not-be-afraid.html](http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2014/12/do-not-be-afraid.html). 12/15/20).

With God's unconditional love and favor and in the absence of fear, the angel tells Mary, "For no word from God will ever fail," or as in some translations, "Nothing is impossible with God." Mary could now respond in submission and humility to God's call on her life because of the love and favor from God in that moment. She could say a resounding "Yes!" to an impossible situation because of love.

Friends, when we love, we can submit and be humble to God's call on our lives. Submission has become such a negative word in our society, but it is not a bad thing. When we live and love like this, we look out for others first. We come together, despite whatever differences we may have, and unite in love.

With just five days to go to Christmas, we need that kind of love. As we end 2020 and look ahead to 2021 when we will hopefully return to some normalcy – where we will gather once again in this place to give thanks to God, we need that kind of love. How can you live in love and not fear, trusting Christ more than you ever have? Love – Plan B. Let us pray...

God who abounds in perfect love, we need Your love more than ever in our world. We need to not be afraid, but to trust Your presence with us. Help us to follow Mary's wonderful example of accepting Your favor and grace and following Your call. Let us affirm – in all that we say and do – that nothing is impossible with You. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.