

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
4th Sunday of Advent, Year A
December 18, 2016
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

Here we are, the last Sunday of Advent, one week before Christmas. Whew, I don't know about you but for me that is hard to believe. And the question that I hear every where I go seems to be, are you ready? Are you ready for Christmas? And, of course, what this question is asking is have you purchased and wrapped and mailed all of your gifts? Is your baking finished? Is your house decorated? Are your cards mailed, or at least written? Are you ready? And my response is, don't ask. Let's not even talk about it. I'll be lucky if I'm ready by Christmas Eve. And then I say, well, there are twelve days of Christmas after all.

As I mentioned last week, this same question, are you ready, is asked on a deeper, more spiritual level. Are you ready; are you ready for Christ's birth? Have you completed your Advent preparations? Have you been faithfully preparing for Christmas? Are you ready for the birth of your messiah?

And the response, once again, might be, don't ask. Let's not even talk about it. I'll be lucky if I'm ready by Christmas Eve.

My guess is that Mary might have said the same thing if Gabriel had started off by asking her, are you ready? Joseph as well might have said the same. Mary, are you ready to be a mother, and not just any mother, but the mother of God? Joseph are you ready to have your entire life changed? Are you ready to give up your plans, your dreams? Are you ready to bring into the world a life that will change the world, a life that will bring you the most incredible joy and a life that will bring you the most indescribable pain? Are you ready? And Mary's response might have been, and Joseph's response might have been, don't ask. Let's not even talk about it.

But Gabriel did not ask Mary if she was ready. The angel of the Lord did not ask Joseph if he was ready.

For being ready did not matter. Being faithful, trusting, that is what did matter.

And we know what Mary's response was. After some discussion perhaps, Mary said yes, let it be with me according to your word. And we know what Joseph's response was, he awakened from his dream and he took Mary to be his wife.

What an incredible response from these two amazing people and what an incredible lesson for each of us. Just like with Mary, God does not come to us when we are ready. Just like with Joseph, God does not even ask that we be ready. God does not wait until everything is lined up perfectly in our lives. God does not wait until our Advent preparation is finished. God comes, often in ways that we would least expect. God comes, and in one way or another, God will open our hearts so that we too will respond, let it be with me according to your word.

So pay attention when something seems a little different or when something irritates you or when something pleases you. Pay attention to all of your life, especially when you are least ready. God comes to you as well.

I bet if you asked people you know who have responded to God in their lives, I bet if you asked them if they were ready at the time, their response would be, are you kidding, was I ready? Absolutely not! And if you ask them if God came in the way that they had expected, I bet that their answers would once again be, are you kidding? Absolutely not!

God did not come in expected ways to Mary or to Joseph. God did not come when they were ready. But God came. And God will come, again, and again, and again in each of our lives. For God is always needing to be born. As Meister Eckhart wrote in the 14th century, "What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the Son of God fourteen hundred years ago, and I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture?"

What good is it to me, what good is it to us, what good is it to God if we do not, each of us, give birth to God in our own time and in our own culture. What a thought! And the challenge for each of us is to discern just how it will be in our own lives, how will we give birth to God in our own lives. We have heard, many times, about the kind of life that Jesus lived. We know what is important to Jesus, to God. Knowing Jesus' love for the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the sick, the sinners, to give birth to Christ in our own lives means to live in some special way that will bear witness to the life Jesus lived. To give birth to Christ in our own lives means that we will live

in some special way that will find us loving the same ones Jesus loves. Our Gospel, our God, invites each of us to discern, to determine just how we will do it with no two doing it in the same way, but doing it, giving birth to Christ in our own lives. Remember, with God, all things are possible.

And so, on this last Sunday of Advent, remember that we can all be Mary, we can all be Joseph, regardless of our gender, regardless of our age, regardless of whether or not we are ready.

So spend some time thinking, praying about how you, too, will live like Mary, how you, too, will live like Joseph, how you, too, will give birth to Christ in your own life.

Ready or not, God comes. And all that we have to do is to be willing to respond, perhaps even disputing it at first, but finally, all that we have to do is to respond, even if we are not ready, especially if we are not ready. All that we have to do is to respond, let it be with me according to your word.