

Treasured Faith
Luke 2:1-7, 16-20
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The other night at our Interfaith Series on Prayer, Father Joachim Lally asked, "What are the two types of energy?" After many guesses he named them. There is "Doing" energy and "Letting" energy. We tend to think that our Christian faith is all about doing. Doing more, doing better, working more and seeking to prove our faith in God. But another kind of energy that God looks for is letting energy. Mary's faith in God was a letting energy. When the angel comes to her to tell her she will bear a son, she was not sure what this meant or how it would work, but she replied, "Behold the servant of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to your word."

Many of us struggle with our faith because we don't think we are doing enough. We get caught up in this productivity and capitalistic mentality that society puts on us and we feel like we aren't doing enough for Jesus. We are somehow weak in faith. We think it is all on us to advance the Gospel. Well maybe you are not obsessed with these thoughts, but as a spiritual leader, it is something that is never far from my mind.

Luke's version of how Jesus came into the world gives us some insight about Mary's role in it. So, let's look at how Mary first reacts to the news that she will be pregnant.

And the angel Gabriel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now,

you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. Luke 1:28-38

It appears that Mary did nothing to gain God's favor. In fact, she is really surprised and a bit confused about how this could be. Isn't that the way it can be sometimes. We feel unworthy of God's calling, or we even wonder if God chose the wrong person. Yet these doubts do not stand in the way of Mary receiving this call. Eventually, she says, okay I let you. I give you permission. I accept this new path of life you are leading me on. Her faith is in God's ability to do what God is planning. Her faith is not in believing she is the right person for the calling, but rather that God can make it happen. Her faith is in the phrase, "Nothing is impossible with God."

Faith is not in ourselves. Faith is in God and trusting God's actions in the world. We may not fully understand it. We may not see the big picture or how we fit in it, but we trust that God is at work, and we let God be God. Now I realize that that is easier said than done. But there is another thing that Mary did in her life that I believe is helpful for all of us to embrace and grow from. Mary treasured and pondered things in her heart. This phrase

comes up when unusual things happened to her that makes her pay attention and hold onto it.

First she treasured. She counted small events as unique and something to be cherished. Many of us do this in different ways. When unusual or unexpected things happen that seem to be divinely ordered we need to pay attention to them. For Mary it was the testimony of the shepherds, the odd prophecies given to her in the temple, or how Jesus spoke about needing to be in his Father's house when he was found in the temple at age twelve. These were all confirmations for Mary that this child was destined for great things and God was working through her to do this.

That is faith, when we treasure and treat as precious and important the work of God in our lives. When we pay attention and seek to identify times when we realize that God is at work and hold onto them as precious signs, strengthening our faith. Jesus even says, "Seek first the kingdom of God." And "The kingdom of God is like a buried Treasure that when found you sell everything to receive it." We need to treasure, above all else, God's kingdom work in our lives.

The third thing Mary does is she ponders these things in her heart. She realizes she won't fully understand or see how these things all connect, but she continues to look for clues and deeper understanding. Understanding not just intellectually, but in her heart.

There are several stories of Mary encountering Jesus and she is not quite sure what to expect. Like at the wedding of Cana. She was surprised that Jesus first refused to do a miracle for the wedding. But then tells the servants to follow his commands no matter what. She trusted that he would do something soon.

Even in the end when Jesus was dying on the cross her faith was strong enough to be there with Jesus even till the end with faith that God would still do the impossible. Three days later she is headed to the tomb with two other women to care for the body and trust in God's unfailing love once again even if she could not see how.

We all struggle to some degree with not feeling like we measure up to some self-imposed standard that makes us doubt God's presence in our lives. We try way to hard sometimes to prove to others or ourselves we are excellent followers of Jesus, when what we really need to do is let go. Let Go and Let God. We need to let go of the notion that God uses well equipped and talented persons, when in reality God uses average people who are willing to submit to God even when we don't see how it will turn out.

We can learn a lot from Mary's life. She did not look at herself, but to God to do the impossible. She treasured these God moments to shape and guide her life forward and she pondered these things instead of rejecting them until she could see the bigger picture. Let us be like Mary and let Go and let God be about the work in us to do what seems impossible to us, for all things are possible in God.