

Into the Unknown – a message by Rev. Grace Wulff

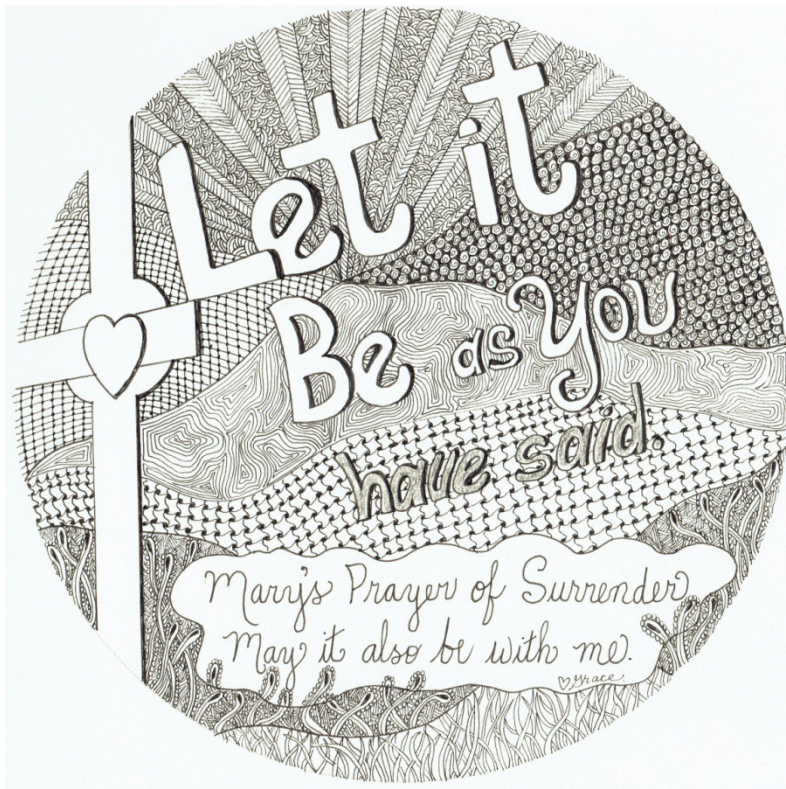
I realize that it is almost three weeks past Christmas time, and most of us have packed up the Christmas ornaments, put the Christmas tree away and rearranged our rooms which can often feel barren after all the decorations.

But today I want to go back to Mary, because her response to the angel has challenged me to think about how I respond to God as I look on a New Year.

Luke 1:35-38 New King James Version (NKJV)

³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.”

³⁸ Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.



In a number of translations, the simple words “Let it Be” are clear... a phrase the Beatles picked up on, as they sang these words:

**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**

We have, of course, the gift of hindsight, but I wonder what went through Mary's mind as she stated those simple words of trust and surrender:

“Let it be to me, as you have said.”

This is so different from our usual way of thinking where we try to have a handle on life's events. We plan, we fill our calendars, we practice good health care for prevention, but we often don't stop to pause and say these simple words... “let it be”.

When we think of Mary, now revered among all women, we hold her up as having it all together. But I wonder, what went through her mind as she swelled in pregnancy, even in disgrace with those who didn't understand.

What did she say to Elizabeth, her cousin, as they pondered the miraculous and mysterious circumstances they found themselves in? We know she was filled with joy, wonder, and perhaps some apprehension?

What were the conversations she and Joseph had as they prepared for their future together in the shroud of disrespect and uncertainty? How did she handle the hot dusty road, away from her familiar surroundings, to give birth in the poorest of circumstances?

Was her heart filled with wonder after giving birth, to find visitors, strangers coming to worship this little babe?

What were her questions? Perhaps she felt fear as they fled to Egypt; wondering why, if such a miracle had happened to her, did she find herself fleeing for the life of her child? Was she aware of the great grief of mothers everywhere in Bethlehem wailing for their children, as she and Joseph escaped?

We don't know what the future holds, and Mary didn't either. I can only imagine her mother's heart, filled at times with incredible pride and joy, and then the ache of suffering. As we watch her life unfold in the New Testament, I can't help wonder what she thought; the scriptures say she pondered these things in her heart.

As we are at the threshold of a new year, we too might wonder what is ahead. Indeed our world is uncertain, the news is often grim.

We can make plans and preparations. We fill up our calendars. But we can't predict the future, in fact we are told by Jesus not to. Why worry about tomorrow, He said! Today has enough trouble of its own!

As I pondered these things and the words of Mary, "Let it Be", I wondered, was she passive in accepting what God had for her? Did she have an inner struggle? I am in awe of her deep trust and immediate response.

Mary did not know how this would unfold. We can only imagine what her next days were like, knowing her life had changed forever. I wonder what her next conversations were like, with Joseph, with her family.

Another patriarch from the Old Testament came to mind, and we have read his story this morning. Abraham too was on the threshold of change, a future he could not imagine. He too might have said: "Let it be to me as you have said".

His journey involved action and obedience. He said good-bye to his family and travelled to unknown territory.

I believe the common denominator between both Abraham and Mary is that they chose to trust, even though they did not know what the future held. Abraham could not sit still; he was called to move forward, even into an uncertain future.

There was a deep understanding evident in both Abraham, and in Mary, that their lives were in God's hands, and that is the safest place to be. They demonstrate trust and obedience in a place of unknowing.

On New Year's Day this beautiful prayer written by Minnie Haskins came into my news feed and it says it so well:

**“And I said to the One who stood at the gate of the year,
‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown’.
And He replied, ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand
Into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light
And safer than a known way.’”**

One of the things I like to do at the beginning of each new year is to choose a word to focus on for the year.

This year the word that is standing out is the word: Victory.

Victory implies a struggle, or even a battle. Sometimes those battles are in our minds as we choose faith over fear. Our battle might be against depression, or pain, or even anger.

Victory comes when we say “Yes” to God, knowing that God knows it all, and will never leave us. It is complete trust, no matter what our circumstances are.



It is in surrendering, and letting go that we can truly experience victory. “Let it be”, we can say, “I choose to follow you, please show me the path of life.”

“Please show me the path *you have for me!*”

It is a prayer I often pray when I work at the hospital. I’ll share just one little story this morning, of God’s leading. This story took place on Christmas Day.

We had some lovely gifts that had been prepared for me to give away, including hand-made ornaments made of beautiful fabric. I went to the ICU unit, and saw a woman who looked like she might need some encouragement.

I didn’t know her, or anything about her. But I took one of the ornaments and walked into the room, introducing myself as the hospital chaplain, and asked her if she would like a Christmas gift. She looked at the gift I gave her, and tears came... it is a heart, she said. True, I had picked the only heart-shaped ornament, without any thought.

She went on to tell me that she was facing heart surgery, and she seemed afraid... she too faced an uncertain future.

And here, I had given her an ornament shaped like a heart!

I recognized we were in a sacred moment, where God had used a simple heart-shaped ornament to touch a woman’s heart when she needed it the most. She allowed me to pray for her and her upcoming surgery. And I rejoiced in this beautiful Christmas miracle. It was a moment of victory!

1 John 5:4 ***says “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”***

What an incredible promise. We might be uncertain of what will happen on our journey, but we know that God overcomes the world and this is victory! We know the One who knows the end of the story!

Romans 8:31 says: ***“What then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? And the next verse says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all... how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”***

When we are discouraged, and unsure, we can read these words from 1 Corinthians 10:12: ***No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”*** This is victory!

Knowing that we have an all-knowing God who knows our name, we can also trust in His unfailing love to us. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says: ***But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

And so we can pray this simplest of prayers, a prayer of Mary. “Let it be, Lord... may it be as you have said.” Amen.