

Christie Alston

12/28/14

Pardon Me, may I interrupt?

OT: Isaiah 6:1-8, NT: Luke 1: 36-38 and Luke 2:25-35

As we head into the New Year, how many of you already have plans for 2015? Maybe you want to head back to school, get a promotion, start a new hobby or start living a healthier life. All of these are good things, but I have two questions for you: 1. Did you talk to God about your plans? and 2: Did you leave room for His plans in your life?

Let us pray

When you think of God, do you envision him as a master planner who has planned everything out, or do you think of Him as a hands-off God who lets everything run its own course? I think how you answer that question can directly impact how you respond to God's when interruptions come into your life.

In our Bible readings today, we came across two people who had their lives interrupted, and their paths changed by God. One was a scribe turned prophet and the other was an unwed virgin girl, who became the mother of Jesus. So why does God send interruptions into our lives and how are we to respond? Why doesn't he just let us plan out our own lives?

I think God loves us too much to leave us on a path that doesn't involve his plans. I believe that when he steps in, it is not to harm us or to

inconvenience us, rather it is to draw us into a deeper relationship with Him and then in turn to use us to draw others to Jesus.

We saw in the OT reading that God was looking for a spokesman, someone to warn his people to turn back to God and to tell of the coming Messiah. Being a prophet wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and perhaps the phrase "Don't kill the messenger" could have started with them. I spent the last few months studying the prophets, and interestingly enough, people back then were similar to people today: Going their own way and not wanting anyone to tell them they were wrong, so you can imagine that signing up to be a prophet, pretty much put you on the outcast list. But regardless of the consequences, When God asked whom should I send Isaiah responded with a resounding "Here I am, send me!" and when God called on Mary she responded with a Yes, that we still celebrate today. But how often do we think about what her yes cost her?

When I read about Mary I imagine a young woman who was dreaming about the life she was about to start with Joseph. Her and her mom were probably getting ready for her wedding, dreaming about how many children she would have and if they would be like her or Joseph. And perhaps on the day the angel visited her she was planning how she would decorate the house as she went along doing her chores. What I know she wasn't doing was planning on having a baby that didn't belong to Joseph. On that day, Mary didn't give up her plans; rather she adjusted them to make room for God.

The other day, one of the teens of this church asked me why would God say no to something that is good, why would he deny me the chance to find happiness the way I want to find happiness. And I think if we are honest, that is a question that we have all struggled with from time to time, but for those of us who are a little older and maybe a little wiser we often know that when God says no to one dream or desire he says yes to something so much better. So how was it that Mary, was able to fully understand this, how was it that she had the courage to say yes? Because if I'm honest as much as I would love to sit her and say that if I was in Mary's shoes I would say yes, I'm not sure that I would have. I probably would have had a whole lot of questions to ask before I even considered something so extreme.

But before we look at why we should say yes, and why Mary did say yes, lets take an honest look at how easily it is to say no.

Perhaps like many of us today, Mary could have told God she didn't have room for HIM in HER plan. She could have whipped out her day planner and showed God how she had everyday planned leading up to her wedding, and then after her wedding she had it all planned out: how she would have 2.5 kids, a dog and a house and husband that she would take care of. She like every good woman would do it all and still have fresh baked cookies cooling on the stove!

Church I think we often do this to God; we show him OUR schedules and ask him to be ok with the few minutes a day we dedicate to him. We may even have our schedule full volunteering and doing "God's" work but we have no

room for His plans and I think we may miss out on a lot of blessings when we pencil God out of our lives.

Another reason we and perhaps Mary could justify saying no, is because we reason that what God is asking of us is too big of a sacrifice. We become fearful of the "what ifs" that we don't even consider that this could be the best thing to happen to us. Let's take a look at someone who told Jesus the sacrifice was too big: (read Matthew 19 16-22).

In this story the rich young man, who clearly loved and obeyed God, came to Jesus asking what else he must do. He was already following the commandments but when Jesus called for him to offer a personal sacrifice he said No. I think many of us can be like this, we would rather have a list of rules to follow because it's easier and we don't have to get personally involved. We want a to do list that we can check off each night before we go to bed... Didn't kill anyone, check, didn't steal, check. Instead God calls us to a radical life. A life in which we let go of the gods of this world, money, status, health and time.... and if we do we will live a life that not only changes us, it change the world around us. The sad thing about this young ruler is that though he was loved deeply by Jesus, he was so scared of the unknown that he walked away, and with his NO, that still echoes into today, we never hear of him again. I'm sure he continued to live a good life and follow the commandments, but his legacy probably stopped with him, and church WE DO NOT want our legacy to stop with us.

So why did Mary say Yes and why should we say Yes when God knocks on our door asking us to follow him?

The first thing we have to remember is that God has a plan. He is not just up in Heaven running the world by the seat of his pants.

It says in Jeremiah 29:11-13. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

When God called on Mary he was fulfilling a plan that he had since BEFORE the creation of time. Remember that before God created earth, the Trinity existed, which means Jesus existed (his first appearance was NOT in the Christmas story) and they knew that we as humans would screw it up and that he would have to come down to be our savior. So when God asks you to do something, keep in mind that he has had this planned out for a VERY long time and that when He asks you to do something he has eternity in mind.

As many of you may know, teaching was not my first career. In 2010 my life was interrupted in the form of a lay off. What I could have asked was why would God, take a single mother, who already battled cancer and got herself through college take away my only means of income. I could have had a pity party and reminded God of all the trials I had already gone through, but instead I remember feeling at peace, I knew without a doubt that God was in control of this situation, because he had ALWAYS been in

control and it has ALWAYS worked out for me. So why did he lay me off, because he had a much better plan for my life. He wanted me to be a teacher, he wanted to me encourage kids and also to tell others about his love for them and he also wanted me to have more time with my son before he went to CT to live with his dad. I trusted God, because God has proven through his Word and through my experience that he is faithful and trustworthy.

I think Mary also knew without a doubt that God was trustworthy. Being Jewish Mary would have known the stories of how God saved her people over and over and over again. She would have known that she was part of the promised people and that God would one day send a savior to save them. So when God called on Mary, though she might have been afraid, she did trust Him and though her life was anything but predictable it was an amazing life that we still talk about today. And not only did it affect Mary's life, it also affected Joseph's life. I believe that when we say Yes to God, it not only blesses us, it also blesses our loved ones. There is no greater testimony then a life lived for God.

So church I could go on and on about why we should let God interrupt out lives, but taking one look at the people in the Bible, we know none of them on their death beds, and many died for God, said "Now that I think about it what God asked of me was to much of a sacrifice and I wish I had said NO" and our story will end the same if we say yes. So lets say yes to God, lets live a life like Jesus who always let God interrupt, whether is was to stop and heal somebody, to hang out with tax collectors or to sacrifice his

life on the cross. Jesus accepted all God's interruptions with grace and joy and even when he was scared he relied on the strength and grace of God to get him through the interruption.

This year let your life be open to interruptions and remember that Jesus not only stopped to help people in his day, he has promised to never leave you or forsake you, which means he will enter the new year with you and will hold your hand through every joy or trial you face. So don't be afraid of the "What-ifs" Don't be afraid because you can trust the one who is asking... So the question remains: will you stop and let him in, when He knocks?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.