Be It unto Me According to Your Word

Evan Lature

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Luke 1: 26-38

A painting of a blue wall

Description automatically generatedIt gives me so much comfort as I read the story of Mary over and over. The more I ponder on her, the more I see a woman of faith and courage standing contrast to our pleasure-seeking and self-promotion culture. The simplicity of her faith speaks volumes to those who seek God whole heartedly.

**Following God with obedience**

The young Mary chose to fear the Lord when she heard about the annunciation. “I’m the Lord’s servant. Be it unto me according to Your word”. Chris Castaldo on his article that he wrote about Mary *The Virgin Mary: A Conversation with Timothy George* contends Mary is an inspiring example of faith. He marvels at the thought of a 13-15 year-old-girl about to give birth, leaving her family to travel over 70 miles to Bethlehem, and leaves her entire support system in reliance upon the Lord. (<https://www.newcovenantnaperville.org/Talking-Mary-With-Timothy-George>)

*A girl who became pregnant out of wedlock would have been terrified. The whole social structure was set up for children to be born within marriage. Genealogy and ownership of children was seen as very important. Girls who became pregnant outside marriage would probably have had to leave their homes and their families. There was the potential of being sold into slavery or of being stoned to death. She may have been married off quickly or banished from her home and village, which may have led women to prostitution or slavery when she had no way of supporting herself.* *(http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/virginmary\_1.shtml)*

Joseph her husband was thinking to divorce Mary quietly when he found Mary was pregnant. Yet he changed his mind after an angel appeared ho him (Matthew1:18).

I wonder what happened in her inner being a moment later when she pondered things and all possibilities she would face: *did she ever doubt? did she feel like revisiting her answers?* We are not told much about Mary’s feelings, but we know that she went forward to keep what she had said to the angel Gabriel. **The story of Mary is going to the opposite direction of our natural intuitive to control and comfortable seeking**. She demonstrates what it means to follow God whole-heartedly.

Recently, I had a wonderful time with one brother. We talked about loving and trusting God. We see that both of love and trust are correlational: we love God by trusting Him. Later we pushed a little farther thinking that it’s easy to love God when everything seems fine. But what happens when things turn ugly, filled with uncertainties, and depressing, will we find ourselves loving God? It’s not in good happy circumstances to see if someone really loves you or not. It’s in hardships and bad times; they are the litmus test for love.

*Our modern world doesn’t get along well with the idea of hardships and sufferings.* The world teaches us to indulge, to seek pleasure, and to get comfortable as much as we can. Nevertheless, wonderful stories of faith are produced in the times of hardships and sufferings – when everything beyond one’s control. *Do we choose comfort over love to God? Will we leave our comfort when God calls us?*

**An intimate relationship**

I remember a story from my country. In 2010, *Merapi* (which means volcano) erupted and swept away the area with its lava and eruptive materials, claiming 367 human deaths, 277 injured, 410,388 evacuated as well as the damage of infrastructures, houses, livestock and agricultural areas (<http://miavita.brgm.fr/pressroom/Pages/ayearafterthe2010Merapieruption.aspx>). Indonesia was in deep grief. One media captured it poignantly in a picture of an old woman with a face covering by volcano’s ashes whose crying made tear tracks on her skinny cheeks. This old lady had been living in the area for all of her life with other villagers. Although *Merapi* has always been erupting in unpredicted times, and therefore, people had legitimate reasons to leave the area, they chose to stay instead. They believe that *Merapi* has been so good to them. This could be understandable as the eruptive materials fertilize their land. So *Merapi* has been perceived as a divine power for local’ folk religion. One of them argued that how come they can’t leave *Merapi since* it has been a source of life for them. *Merapi* has been faithful to them and so must they.

I was intrigued as I read the story. My modern mind could not accept such logic. How come they say *Merapi* is faithful when it gives them disasters over and over? As I pondered the story, I stumbled upon Job in the Bible. After the loss of his wealth, sons, and daughters, his wife came to him and challenged him to curse his God. Job gave an answer that sounds similar to the villagers of *Merapi*, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10)

To be honest, my intellect could not comprehend such a situation. I ended up holding a suspicious mind toward God. What if God was evil and good at the same time? I cringed at my thoughts. Every way I take to reasoning in order to find the answer, I was stumped. But this leads me to another beautiful orthodoxy. Humans tend to answer their questions by a reasoning approach; that way they feel satisfied. But I found there is other way to satisfy our soul that cannot fulfilled through an intellectual way. It is something anchored in an intimate relationship. A relationship is an elusive bird in the realm of logics and reasoning. A relationship brings us into a deeper spiritual dimension where we experience that God is trustworthy in the midst of hardships and sufferings; that His love is better than life; that no matter what perilous journey ahead- what matters the most is His promise that He’s with us.

**A guarded heart**

If we continue to read the story in the Bible, Luke describes Mary as a woman who ponders things in heart.

* But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)
* His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51b)

If we’re honest, there’s a natural appeal with a guarded heart person. We feel such peace/safe when we’re around them, and they make us keep attracted to the pristine joy they have. They can touch the deepest of our feeling effortlessly. They look like they own their lives as if the freedom is in their hands, but at the same time they give us the impression that they are not the master of their own. To such person, instead of achieving, life is about emptying. To them, lots of achievements more often reflect what actually empties in a soul. It’s when someone empties themselves, they’ll be fulfilled. Bernard of Clairvaux once said, “If, then, you are **wise**, you will show yourself rather than as **a reservoir than a canal.** A canal spreads abroad water as it receives it, but reservoir **waits** until it is filled before **overflowing**, and thus communicates, **without loss to itself, its superabundant water.”**

To be a reservoir than a canal requires a discipline of heart. It’s a choice we make to stop from our busy anxious world; it’s a discipline to see things from God’s perspective and to realize that He makes everything beautiful in His time; it’s a silence to look back on things He has done in the past; it’s an intentional conversation with God every time, and it’s a posture to test our heart in the light of God’s truth. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”. As God’s servants, what are we doing these days to take care of our heart?

**Conclusion**

It’s very carved in my heart that one aspect of life is a journey from one chapter to another. This coming week marks the end of Fall semester. For some of us, that marks an end of one significant episode in your lives before embarking on a different new journey. Questions and plans arise coupled with some uncertainties and anxieties.

Learning from Mary today, we learned again that the most important thing in life is to love God in our obedience and it costs us hardships and sufferings. Nevertheless, He is faithful and trustworthy. He sends us comfort, peace, and joy along the way as we nurture our intimate relationship with Him with a guarded heart. When waves of uncertainties beyond our control toss us back and forth in the ocean of life, let’s not be discouraged but anchored in God’s love. Let us rejoice in the knowledge that God takes pleasure when He thinks about each of us, calls us by our names, and holds us in His embrace. In His grace, we see God’s hands in the past, present, and future. By the power of Holy Spirit, we’re enabled to say like Mary does, “I’m your servant, Lord. Be it unto me according to Your word”.

Be It unto Me According to Your Word

By Don Moen

Be it unto me according to your Word  
According to your promises  
I can stand secure  
Carve upon my heart  
The truth that sets me free  
According to your Word O Lord  
Be it unto me  
  
You promised your word will deliver  
Lord, we believe it's true  
You promised us joy like a river  
Lord we receive it from you  
These things you have spoken  
And you're bringing to pass  
This world's disappearing  
But your word will last  
  
You promised to carry our sorrows  
Lord, we believe it's true  
You promised unending tomorrows  
Lord we receive them from you  
You'll be our Provider  
In Your word it's revealed  
By the strifes that You bore  
Lord, we have been healed