

From the Convent to the Fish Barrel: My Life with Martin Luther. In my head, it's what I envision Katie Luther titling her memoir if she were a modern day woman sitting down to chronicle her life in a tell all. Hers is a story that I wish were able to be better told, hers is a voice I wish we had more of, because there's so much we don't know, there's so much that we only have of her life in hearsay, what others said about her, what Luther himself said about her, but we have so little of her own voice. Yet, her life was a remarkable one. She was a woman who took hold of her own faith life and demanded the ability to walk her own journey. She looked at the decision she had made to join a convent and had the audacity and the bravery to say that this wasn't her faith anymore, not after she had heard what Luther was preaching, the things he had to say about grace and love in the midst of an unrelenting world.

She, along with nine other women, crawled into fish barrels in the middle of the night in the hopes of being snuck safely out of their convent in order to start a new life, a new beginning. She kind of got stuck with Luther when it came to the whole marriage thing, she was the only one of their group of ten Luther couldn't find a husband for and all of his buddies in the Reformation movement were telling Luther he needed a wife if he was going to encourage priests to get married. He needed to set an example, and so

they kind of just looked at each other like, well...I guess we can do this, and so they did. And yet...what Luther found in Katie wasn't just a wife to fill a role and keep up appearances. He found a partner, someone who pushed him with her own thoughts about theology and faith, someone with her own voice who wanted to make a difference in the journey Luther was forging through the world. She brewed beer and wrote letters and asked questions and every single challenge that presented itself in their lives, she faced head on. Life after the fish barrel was one she chose to live boldly and bravely because what else could she do with the one life God had given her?

And maybe you're wondering why I'm mentioning Katie Luther, Martin Luther's wife, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, but this is one of those fun little happenstances of the liturgical year where a commemoration day falls just exactly on the *right day* for it to be celebrated. Because today is Katie Luther's commemoration day and I could not think of a better woman to be celebrated on the same day that we hear the annunciation. Mary and Katie Luther, fierce, brave woman who were willing to boldly go where few others would have been willing to, who were placed in situations where they could say yes, I will do this or no, absolutely not, no way in the world, please let me exit left, and they had the indescribable ability to just say yes, let's see where this goes. Sign me up for the journey.

I want you to think about yourself at 13. 13 years old. That odd shift between middle and high school. You're barely a teenager, but you're no longer a kid. You're something kind of in between. You don't know who you are yet, but you maybe have a glimpse of who you want to be. Frankly, at 13 most of us were probably a bit of a mess. So imagine your 13 year old self being asked to take on do something that would change not only the course of your entire life, but the course of the entire world, the course of all humanity. Imagine being 13 years old and being asked to not only bear, but raise, nurture, and love the salvation of the whole world. I'm guessing not many of our 13 year old selves could handle that big of an ask, and yet, that is where we find ourselves as we step into Mary's narrative this morning.

I know it's jarring to think of Mary as a *kid*, and it's true, 13 in Ancient Israel was not the 13 of 21st century America. It wouldn't have been out of the norm for a 13 year old girl to be on the brink of marriage and adult level decisions, but it doesn't change the fact that she was still really, really young to face *this level* of decision. I mean honestly, Luke's description of what happens when Gabriel appears seems downright chill when you think about what's happening here.

Luke tells us that Gabriel appears to Mary, so first off you have an angel of the Lord appearing out of nowhere right in front of you which is

terrifying enough and then he just jumps right in telling Mary that she's the favored one and the Lord is with her. If this were any one of us, I have a feeling there would have been some level of screaming in fright, turning tail in the other direction, or passing out, and if you get past that step then your response to the whole favored, Lord is with you thing is probably going to be some combination of I'm sorry, what? Why are you here? You have the wrong house. Kindly get out. But Luke just says Mary was perplexed and pondered what was happening. Y'all, she is 13 and just like hmm, I wonder what this angel is talking about. And it just gets better from there.

Gabriel just lays it all on our there for her what is about to happen. She's going to become pregnant, nevermind the whole virgin, not married yet thing. She's going to have a baby, who she doesn't get to pick a name out for. And oh ya know...he's also going to be the Son of the Most High and fulfill the Davidic covenant and basically be the hope of the entire world, no big deal. And again, Mary just is like, how is this going to happen? As opposed to shouting, "No way! You are out of your mind! Get out!" And Gabriel just says, the Holy Spirit is going to make it happen, with very little other explanation of it. And what does Mary say? "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." In 21st century terms she pretty much goes with the gospel according to Nike, *Just*

Do It! Bear the Messiah, bring salvation into the world? Let's do this! She is all in on this plan, immediately, and that is just...mindboggling to me.

And I think what it comes down to is this...Mary had the audacity and the wherewithal to trust the very first thing that Gabriel said to her...that the Lord was with her. There had to have been some instinct within her to take a hot second and go, but I'm just Mary. I'm just little old me, with nothing special to my name. I'm just this random girl, why am I being chosen for this when there have to be plenty of other more qualified, better suited people for this task. Yet, she fought all of that down and trusted that if this was what she had been chosen for then she was going to trust that what Gabriel said was true. The Lord was with her, and that was enough for her. That was enough to see her through what was the first step in a lifelong journey of watching her baby boy grow up into the Messiah.

I think for so many of us, this is where we get stuck. Not in the being asked to give birth to the Messiah aspect of things obviously, but in the I'm just little, old me thoughts which sometimes make it very hard to trust that God is with us. I think sometimes we look around at our lives, at what we journeys we're walking, the things that we're holding, and we kind of shrug our shoulders and say, "Eh, God has bigger things to deal with," or "It's just not that important." I think we look at ourselves in the mirror and go, well,

I'm just me...and why in the world would God concern Godself with this.

I'm not that big of a deal. Oh well, I'll just deal with this on my own.

Mary had the audacity to trust that she was seen by God, like really and truly seen. She had the fierce bravery to trust that God was with her, even as God was asking her to do this gigantic, life-changing thing. Ya know back in the nineties there was that whole "Be like Mike" campaign for kids to embody Michael Jordan's passion, his oomph, his swagger. Today, I think we need to take that same concept and re-invent it a little bit, don't be like Mike, be like Mary. Be audacious, be fierce, be brave enough to not only say, but trust that God sees you, that God is with you. Because honestly, it's easy to do the opposite. It's easy to be like, eh God is out there, far away, not caring about my stuff. It is hard, it is bold, it is brave, it is incredible to affirm in your heart and say, no, today, I am going to trust and believe that God sees me, that God holds me, that God is with me. In the small and in the large, in the easy and in the hard, in the seemingly inconsequential and in the monumental.

Because here's the thing about trusting that promise...it also ties in to who we are called to be, because even though it's slightly different, our call is extremely similar to Mary's. We are called to be bearers of the Word in the world, we are called to be bearers of the hope that is Jesus in the world.

We carry who Jesus is and what Jesus is all about out into the world, and the only way we can do that is by trusting whole-heartedly that God has got us in the midst of that calling. Because sometimes we're going to want to look at that call with all the skepticism and uncertainty that we would have expected of Mary. You want me to do what? You want me to be who in the world? No way, uh uh, not me. And yet, in our hearts we each know we want to respond with the same kind of hope and trust that Mary did, here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word. Or in 21st century terms, I'm here for it, let's do this.

We trust in God's presence with us and for us because it is life-affirming. We trust in God's presence with us and for us because we need that presence for who God calls us to be. As we wind through these last few days of Advent, may you have the audacity to be as fierce as Katie Luther, as fierce as Mary. May you have the audacity to bear a faith that says, I'll jump in that fish barrel, I will take on this calling, because it's who I was created to be. In these final few days of Advent, be bold enough to trust that you are a bearer of the Word of God in the world. The world hears and sees Jesus through you, through your heart, through your love, through your very being. Be bold with your bearing. Be fierce with your bearing. Dare to here the call and say, here am I. **AMEN!!!**