

This morning we're going to jump into the way back machine and take you back to everyone's favorite time in life, 10th grade. Specifically, I'm going to take you back to my 10th grade English class with Mr. Miller. Now, before we get into the story, this all has to come with one massive caveat. Mr. Miller *never* should have been allowed to keep teaching, he was a terrible teacher, and had significant creepy vibes, making girls sit in the front row and all that kind of gross stuff, it wasn't good, and so when it was my turn of the three of us to go through his English class my mom was like, just get through it, recognizing that it wasn't really going to be a big year of learning for me in his classroom.

Now, here's the thing, I was a painfully good kid. Never had a detention, straight A's, never really got in trouble, never tested my limits in school—until those limits met Mr. Miller. I was fifteen and well aware this class was a joke and so my friends and I leaned into it a little bit. Let me give you some examples. By the end of the year, I never took a spelling test, because we convinced him, to let us *give* the spelling tests. Yup, my friend Nicole and I sat at the front and gave the rest of our classmates the spelling tests. Within a few months of class, I stopped sitting at a desk. There was a table in the back corner by the window, that I just decided was going to be my desk, and he let me sit there. On the table. One day, my friend Cassie

accidentally dropped her phone out of the window, we were on the first floor, and rather than asking to be allowed to walk out and go get it, we convinced him the most logical thing was to let me *hop out of the window* to get it. By the end of the year, we spent more time on his computer than I think he did, and I can honestly say I have no idea why.

I look back at that year now and my mind just boggles because what in the world? The only thing I remember learning that year? That I hated John Steinbeck. We read *The Pearl* and I said never again was I reading anything to do with that guy. I think about it and I'm just like, I have no idea what inspired my teacher's pet, do all the right things self to just seriously *not care* when it came to this man's attitude in class. And as I've thought about it, I keep hearing over and over in my head a conversation we had in Bible study, a conversation about the sheer audacity of being 15. If that had been my freshman year, I would have been too new to high school nervous to do anything. If it had been junior or senior year, it would have been too wrapped up in college applications to mess around. But it was sophomore year, I was 15, I was smart enough to see the whole class was a joke, and so I just leaned into being 15, and I just did not care. I pushed all the limits I could, still got an A, and never had to take a spelling test.

There's something stupidly special about this time in our lives. This time that is the heart of being a teenager. You're still young enough to not be entirely weighed down by expectations and the cares of the world, but old enough to realize that you have a certain amount of agency over your life. The world is your oyster, you don't think anything bad can happen to you, and you are willing to see just how far you can push things, because what's the worst that can happen? Your teacher tells you no you *can't* jump out of the window? It is a unique time in our lives, we're willing to be daring, audacious, and vocal, we're willing to see just where we can go in the world and how far we can bring the world with us.

Our gospel today is not set in Mr. Miller's English class, but it still is set within the wide, audacious world of a 15 year old, and I dare to say that that makes all the difference. This year, we have skipped over all the quintessential pre-Christmas stuff, the lectionary skipping over Gabriel and his pronouncements about Jesus' birth, and we get straight to the heart of it all: Mary and her response. This morning, we find Mary on the road to find a safe space to internalize the fact that her entire life has changed, that the fate of the whole world now rests on her shoulders, and the reality that all of this could legitimately kill her—between the difficulty of childbirth and the threat of people finding out she is pregnant out of wedlock with a baby that

isn't Joseph's. Mary goes to the one place she knows she will be safe, her kinswoman Elizabeth, who is in the midst of her own life-changing moment. In her old age, assuming she is barren, Elizabeth finds herself pregnant and her husband now cannot talk, struck dumb by the same angel that told Mary she was going to have a baby. Both of these women find themselves in the midst of situations that they could never have anticipated, and so who better to understand what they're going through than each other.

I like to imagine that once all the details get out, all the excitement, and wonder, Elizabeth blesses Mary for what she has taken on, and what is Mary's response? Let's overturn the powers of the world! And I like to imagine that in that moment, Elizabeth too is astounded at the audacity of being a 15 year old in the world, even if that world is very different than ours. The reality is, some things are universally true and being a 15 year old is one of those things.

When we think about the reality of Mary being a teenager in the Christmas story, we have a tendency to cringe, to be horrified, like God is asking a 14/15 year old girl to do this?! But this week in Bible study someone said that it almost had to be a 15 year old because who else would have the audacity, the courage, the chutzpah to say not only, yes, I will carry the Savior of the world at potential detriment to my life, but to also sing a

song about overturning the powers of the world immediately after the angel's pronouncement. Only at 15 do we have the ability to say, yes, I can do this impossible thing and while we're at it, let's throw down the oppressors and get rid of the tyrants of this world. Only a 15 year old would have the ability to just *believe* all of this, without asking a ton of questions, without fearing what may happen, moving forward with the sheer determination of a kid who says bring it on.

In the face of all of these things: an unexpected, unplanned, Holy Spirit pregnancy, a life-threatening pregnancy, the promise that the Messiah is coming into the world, Mary's response isn't, yes, blessed am I for taking this task on, her response is, let's see what God is going to do with this because I am here for it. This isn't Mary meek and mild, this is Mary flexing and stomping her feet and saying, yes sir, it is about time we took care of the problems of this world and sign me up for the process. The Magnificat isn't some peaceful Christmas carol, it is a protest anthem, which could only be proclaimed by a 15 year old who trusts that yeah, God can do all of these things, and yeah, I can help. God can scatter the proud, fill the hunger, turn the rich away, bring down the powerful, smash the thrones, and lift up the lowly. We hear this stuff in the world now and we think the people who proclaim it are optimistic idealists with rose-colored glasses,

who don't see the reality of the world, but when it's Mary, we sugar-coat it and say aww how sweet, rather than looking at the oomph of her words.

Y'all, the Magnificat, the belief of it, the power of Mary's words are not to be sugar coated and sweetened up. Mary's response to Jesus' coming into the world is *finally* God's justice is going to get done, finally the powerful will be thwarted, and the lowly will have their time. This isn't idealism, this is faith. This is trust that this is the Messiah that is coming into the world, and somewhere along the way, as we get older, as we live in the world around us, we water this down and say, oh well this is a sweet sentiment, but it's not reality. It is *high time* that we re-claimed the audacity of our 15 year old selves and said, yes, this baby who is coming into the world is about to turn this whole thing upside down and mess some things *up* and I am going to help him.

We need this message, we need a reminder that Jesus isn't coming into the world to raise the powerful up higher, pander to the rich and elite, and keep silent about the injustice of the world. Jesus is coming to turn over some tables, call out our oppressive behavior, and raise up the least, the lost, the forgotten, the shunted to the side. We cannot say, aww, sweet Mary, bless her, while simultaneously living in a way that looks down your nose at the message she brings into the world. We want Christmas to be about

beautifully wrapped, perfect packages, when really Mary declared that Christmas was about rebellion and protest and God shaking the dust off of our hearts and jarring us back to the reality that the world isn't for the powerful, the strongest, the wealthiest, but for those we have a tendency to remove from the picture. Christmas is for the migrant, the immigrant, the refugee, the hungry, the poor, the oppressed. And I know, our instinct is going to be to roll our eyes and say, but that is just not feasible in this world. Y'all it wasn't feasible in the Roman Empire and yet it happened. And it can happen here too, if we dare to have the audacity of our teenage selves and say, yes, sign me up for a faith in a Savior who is ready to turn over some tables, and sign me up for a faith that believes I can participate in that and make a difference too.

In the world we live in, it is not time for silent nights and meek and mild sentiments. It is time for a raucous return to a belief in a God who says the time of the powerful is over, and the Savior is coming from a 15 year old kid who isn't cynical enough to think none of this is possible. This Christmas, embrace your rebellion, remember what it was to be 15 with the world at your feet, with a heart for justice and righteousness beating in your chest. This Christmas take off the rose-colored glasses, jump out the window, and be about Mary's business, the business of justice. **AMEN!!!**