

**The Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Holy Comforter Church  
The Rev. John E. Shields  
December 20, 2009**

**You know how we call certain Sunday's by a label, like Scout Sunday, or UTO Sunday, or Youth Sunday? Well, I have an idea -- let's call today – Dilemma Sunday.**

**Dilemma is what Advent Four is all about. It seems to be about the dilemma of a young girl being pregnant and what she does in her dilemma.**

**Certainly Mary has a dilemma. But really, don't we all? For while we may not face Mary's dilemma, we certainly have those of our own don't we? And, you know, in some ways I think we all face the same dilemma.**

**Think about it!**

**Our common dilemma is that we want things our way. We like to be in control of what happens, when it happens, to whom it happens.**

**The real dilemma is – life doesn't cooperate.**

**And maybe an even greater dilemma is that God seems to be the least cooperative of all.**

**God has a way --- if we can believe anything we read about the accounts of God's interaction with the creation and its creatures – God is always throwing a monkey wrench (new theological term) into our plans. It seems that God creates dilemma(s)**

**Just a few examples from the Bible:**

**Think about it -- Moses minds his business and somebody else's sheep, and God comes along and burns a bush and upsets the entire status quo --- not just for Moses, but for his family, the Israelite people, the Pharaoh and the Egyptian people.**

**The young boy Samuel is just trying to catch a nap and rest up so he can serve old Eli ---but God keeps interrupting his nap to get his attention.**

**A fellow named Jonah wants to go about his business and not go to Nineveh as God had directed, so God sends him on a private cruise with unusual quarters in order to redirect his efforts.**

**A man named Paul is going about happily persecuting Christians and is struck blind in the middle of the road in the middle of the day and is told – “You are changing sides, pal.” (modern translation)**

**Yes, God has a way of dealing with folks and upsetting their plans and their need for control. God creates dilemmas all through the history of God's people.**

**God – through his agent, Gabriel, visits a young Jewish girl named Mary --- and gives her the shocking news --- you are to become pregnant and become the mother of a very special child. ----- Talk about a dilemma!**

**Does Mary say, “You don't understand, I have other plans. Maybe you have a wrong number.”? No, she says, “How can this be?”**

**So Gabriel tells Mary about the special nature of God's choosing her for this dilemma. So, upon explanation, Mary says: "Let it be with me according to your word..."**

**Mary's acceptance is the beginning of an incredible story. Without her acceptance, there would not have been a story.**

**It looks like God creates dilemmas in the lives of people and then works out great purposes through those very people.**

**God works through people.**

**God chooses people to work God's purposes out. And interestingly enough, it seems that God always chooses people who are considered unlikely candidates for doing these great tasks or challenges.**

- **Moses is chosen to lead the people out of bondage.**
- **Samuel and Jonah, very different prophets, are chosen to testify to God's truth.**
- **Paul, the feared persecutor of Christians becomes the greatest evangelist and missionary for Christ.**

**And so today we might say, --- "There God goes again, picking the most unlikely person in the world to bring into the world a savior: A teenage, or even pre-teen girl, from a small, occupied country in the Middle East – an uneducated girl – who would educate a girl? – a girl with no social standing, a girl with no wealth..."**

**After Mary's acceptance, Holy Scripture has her saying this hymn to her cousin Elizabeth. It is sort of her signature song. It is called the Magnificat.**

**"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for  
the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.**

**His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.**

**He has shown strength with his arm;**

**He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.**

**He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and  
lifted up the lowly;**

**He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty..."**

**Which brings me to Frank Sinatra? (How is that for a quick shift?) Frank Sinatra is most often identified with one song above all others. It was sort of his signature song.**

**It is the hymn for our times.**

**You remember it don't you? Frank made it popular --- I once heard Willie Nelson sing it in Greensboro --- yeah, I saw Willie! Our hymn – the hymn of our times, says ----- now get this straight – I love Frank – I also love Willie. Heck, I even like the song – its just bad theology. Just a few verses...**

**"And now, the end is near;  
And so I face the final curtain.  
My friend, I'll say it clear,**

**I'll state my case of which I'm certain.  
I've lived a life that's full.  
I've traveled each and every highway;  
But more, much more than this,  
I did it my way."**

**"I've loved, I've laughed and cried.  
I've had my fill; my share of losing.  
And now, as tears subside,  
I find it all so amusing"  
"To think I did all that;  
And may I say – not in a shy way,  
'No, oh no, not me,  
I did it my way."**

**For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught.  
To say the things he truly feels;  
And not the words of one who kneels.  
The record shows I took the blows –  
And did it my way!**

**Mary says: "*Let it be with me according to your word (for) "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."***

**We admire the "I did it my way mentality." It reinforces our myth of rugged individualism --- the self-made man/woman. Self-made, self-actualized, self-fulfilled, self-educated, self-directed, self, self, self ---- self-centered.**

**"For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught.  
To say the things he truly feels;**

**And not the words of one who kneels.  
The record shows I took the blows –  
And did it my way!’**

**“... And not the words of one who kneels...”**

**But Our Lady does kneel; she allows her life to be totally taken over by God. Mary, in her dilemma kneels and surrenders herself to God “Let it be with me according to your word.”**

**Of course, our dilemma is that God calls us also, for as we've seen, God calls out ordinary folks to do most extraordinary things.**

**If God can use an adolescent like Mary, God can use you.  
If God can use a tongue-tied Moses, God can use you.  
If God can use a young boy Samuel, God can use you.  
If God can use a headstrong, stubborn messenger like Jonah,  
God can use you.  
If God can use a zealous persecutor like Paul, God can use you.**

**Yes, Mary's life is characterized by humility, selflessness and acceptance.**

**Mary is the one who kneels in humility and we too can join with her by giving up our self-will, kneeling and doing it God's way.**

**amen**