



December 21, 2008

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Luke 1:26-38

“The First Disciple”

Like all people everywhere since humans have existed on the face of the earth, we are engaged in a search for the secret of life. We may not be conscious of this, but I believe it is a universal reality.

We read of explorers through history, searching for wealth, happiness, wisdom, even a fountain of youth! Answers come from all sides—speaking of magic wands and potions.

This reminds me of the events that Alice in Wonderland experienced after she traveled through the looking glass. She was directed to eat from a magic mushroom, or drink from a bottle of a magic mixture.

What are the “magic potions” offered to US as the secret to LIFE as it is meant to be?

Some are ACTUAL potions or pills, either prescribed through medical channels, purchased at the local liquor store, illegally purchased and consumed, or bought at the local Walgreen’s or health supplement shop.

There is a fascinating strand through history, of snake oils and tonics peddled from town to town. Not much more than a hundred years ago narcotics like laudanum were being offered to children and babies, to quiet ailments that made them fussy. I remember growing up hearing ads for “Geritol” numerous times every day or so. Does Geritol even exist anymore?

Potions, of course, fail to deliver what they promise. So, we move on, to other things that may not seem like magic potions, but things we approach in similar ways. Things like:

- getting the “right” job, income, clothes, car, house, neighborhood, friends
- changing our diet and exercise routines
- reading self-help books, joining small groups
- getting married; starting a family
- finding the “right” church.

Don't get me wrong! I have nothing against:

---seeing doctors or taking medication--- (some is truly life-changing)

---making changes in eating or exercise habits, or in making use of health products sold in health stores

---seeking rewarding, meaningful employment or saving to buy a much longed-for home

---building nourishing friendships, participating in supportive groups, or reading books to grow in insight and understanding about ourselves

---- marrying, or having children

---or looking for a church where one can grow in faith and learn about God.

What I AM saying is revealed in our Scripture:

None of these things is the **SECRET OF LIFE** as we look for them to be—**AS CONSUMERS.**

It's not what we **TAKE IN**, magic potions we drink or magic mushrooms we eat, that opens the door to life. It is what we **OFFER UP** that opens the door to life as it is meant to be.

Secular Christmas has made a travesty of this truth. The “season of giving” has been usurped by our consumer ways. We think we need to give tangible presents to a multitude of people, or we haven't celebrated Christmas.

Let's look to Mary of Nazareth for our example instead.

The Bible does not give us a lot of information about Mary. We know she was a devout Jew, and lived in Nazareth at the time Jesus was conceived. Nazareth appears to have been an unimportant village—Nathaniel, when he heard of Jesus as someone from Nazareth- blurted, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” And Nazareth is barely mentioned in ancient writings outside Scripture.

Mary was engaged to Joseph. The period of engagement lasted for a year, and it was as binding as marriage. It could only be dissolved by divorce. During the

period of engagement, the woman did not yet live in the bridegroom's home- so, their legal bond was binding, but their lives were still those of an unmarried couple.

Mary may have been a young teenager, since that would have been the traditional age for marriage in her culture, however Scripture does not specify. We do know that Mary and Joseph were not wealthy, because when Jesus was born, Mary faithfully made the temple sacrifice required of her faith—two birds, turtle doves or pigeons—which was the sacrifice of the poor.

Mary may have been descended from the line of the great King David, since the angel, in verse 32, says her son will be given “the throne of his ancestor David”. It is also possible that she was descended from the Levites, since her relative Elizabeth was married to a priest, and the priests, who were Levites, usually married Levite women.

What DO we know, for certain, about Mary? We know about her character. The Bible shows her to be deeply spiritual and sensitive. She was devoted to the teaching and practice of her Jewish faith, and carefully trained her son Jesus to observe that same faith. Her love and loyalty to Jesus brought her to the foot of the cross as he died.

We also know she didn't fully understand Jesus or his mission during his earthly life, much like the twelve followers Jesus called to his join his ministry.

Mary, visited by the angel Gabriel, was the first to receive the good news of God coming to us in Christ. She was the first to hear the gospel.

She felt tumult and fear, she had questions. But she finally responded to the gospel “Here I am, Lord, your servant. I offer all I am to you- I am willing to be your instrument.”

Mary offered up her all. She gave herself, body, mind, spirit, soul, to God. I see her as the first disciple—she responded to God's gift of his Son with her ENTIRE BEING. She did not fully understand what God was doing, but she took the leap of faith to trust God, and follow his leading.

It is not what we TAKE IN that opens the door to life as it is meant to be. It is what we OFFER UP that opens the door to abundant life promised by God.

Christ gave us his life and opened the door to salvation as a free gift to each of us. How do we respond? The secret of life is in Mary's words, "Here I am, Lord, your servant." What is OUR answer to the Lord today?