

## Carol's Reflection – Dec 5 2021

Can you name the days of the week in order?

Now, how about naming them in alphabetical order?

Its not so easy, is it? It is not so easy to change the order of something that we think we know.

At first you might have said, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... or started on Sunday, and then said Monday. And, when I suggested alphabetical order...it takes a bit of a mental stretch to begin with Friday, and then Monday...

It is a mental stretch to see the possibilities of a different order.

If we look at the Gospel of Luke reading today, it is a stretch that is being given to us – a mental stretch, a spiritual stretch, a political stretch – a really big stretch.

The people of the day longed for God to appear and put things right. People were oppressed, Caesar had claimed his place as the 'Son of God' and people of faith knew that was not true. The people longed for God.

And, they longed for God's strength.

And here is our story. Luke is writing an orderly account of all that has happened. He began with the story of Zechariah, an elderly priest who with 'advanced in years' wife Elizabeth will have a child who they will name John. The news is shared when Zechariah is visited by the angel Gabriel. And, really, the news is a shock. Zechariah's doubt leaves him silent for the duration of the pregnancy and Gabriel disappears.

In today's reading, six months have gone by. Gabriel is back, this time to visit Mary and to tell her the news that she will have a baby.

Martyn Payne and Jane Butcher comment:

*What a surprising way for God to step into the world! Everyone longed for God to appear and put things right, but no one expected that it would involve a very ordinary young woman from an insignificant village in the poor north of a powerless country in the Middle East. God who is called 'the most high' by the angel, chooses to send Jesus as a vulnerable, tiny baby to be brought up by a peasant family. No wonder Mary is overwhelmed. Even the angel seems awed by what God is about to do as he addresses Mary as 'truly blessed'.*

Luke gives us Zechariah and Elizabeth, now Mary and soon John and then Joseph and finally Jesus in the Good News of the re-ordering of the world.

*When God is a child, there's joy in our song,*

*The last shall be first, and the weak shall be strong,  
And none shall be afraid.*

Mary is 'truly blessed' with the opportunity to answer 'yes' to God's vision. God needs Mary's 'yes'. God needs Zechariah and Elizabeth and John the baptizer. God needs Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus. God will need shepherds, and angels, and wise old people in the temple. God needs the human 'yes' to re-order the world.

In telling the story in this way, Luke is ensuring that we see the start of the re-ordering – and that we see the connection to all the stories before. We are connected to the yes of co-creation with the stories from Genesis. We are connected to the yes of the forebearers of faith who acted in faithfulness to God. We are connected.

God needs our partnership in hope, peace, joy and love. God needs our part.

The Bible is a collection of stories about God's connection to humanity. It is a vision of the world coming together, of turning oppressive systems upside down. It is the work of re-ordering. And the story from Luke asks us to stretch our understanding of the world – the mental and spiritual and the political ordering (Caesar is not first), the new vision – when God is a child...

And, it is not easy. Just as naming the days of the week in a different order does not come without some thought, so does re-ordering the status quo. Imagine if everyone had a place to live. Imagine if everyone had enough food to eat, and clean water to drink. Imagine if everyone had access to vaccines. Imagine if everyone knew that they were a loved child of God.

What sounds like the lyrics to a song by the Beatles is really a call to imagine the Gospel lived out. Imagine a world for all.

As winter surrounds us with its grip, let me tell you a story about how innovation turned a small part of the world upside down with access to water for all.

I have not been to Bermuda, but I have seen pictures. It is beautiful and lush, and a vacation paradise for some. But as tourists see vacation paradise, those who live in Bermuda know that it has hurricanes every year, and is chronically short of fresh water.

Bermuda, an island in the Atlantic, did not have a permanent population until the early 1600's. Early residents of the island discovered that building homes and roofs particularly out of wood was not a good option. The storms were fierce and the wooden roofs blew off.

Residents turned their attention to the limestone which was in abundance. As they dug out foundations for their homes, they dug out materials for building. They developed a stepped roofing system, which resisted the wind. And, as a bonus – it collected water –

and with wisdom and creativity, the water was directed to tanks which meant that there was water for everyone.

Peter Backeberg of *The Bermudian* reports that “there are strict regulations in our building code that dictate both the water catching ratio for each roof (80%) and a minimum tank size per roof area (eight gallons per square foot).”

Amy Daniels says: Over generations, improvements have been made to both the way these roofs are finished and how captured water is stored. Historically, the lime-covered white roofs also fortuitously had anti-bacterial properties, helping to clean the incoming rain. Even though the material composition has since shifted, the standard roof is still white, reflecting UV rays and thus helping to purify the water.

What innovation will we see here that addresses the needs of everyone? How do we care for those who are the least and the lost but really are the first and the found?

How will the Advent candle of Peace inspire us to live lives of hope, and joy and love in this season.?

May generosity be found, may love be transforming, and may all of us, see in and for ourselves, and in and for others, God’s amazing grace.

Let us say yes, and be partners with God.