

TITLE: "Let It Be"

TEXT: Luke 1:26-45, 56, 57-66 (NT pp. 56-57)

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God."

<sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

<sup>39</sup>In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." ...<sup>56</sup>And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

<sup>57</sup>Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup>Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup>On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. <sup>60</sup>But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." <sup>61</sup>They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." <sup>62</sup>Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. <sup>63</sup>He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. <sup>64</sup>Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup>Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. <sup>66</sup>All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

## Introduction – Listening to the Lord

This is from the *Burt and I series*. Camden Pearce lives out in Mechanics Falls, Maine. One afternoon, he was rocking in his parlor listening to the radio set when the telephone started in to jangling. It was the radio station calling.

“Hello?”

“Is this Camden Pearce?”

He said, “Yes sir.”

“Well, what’s the name of that tune we’re playing?”

Camden KNEW it; “*Battle Hymn of the Republic.*”

They said, “You got it! Besides THAT, you win a free two-week trip to New York City!” Course Camden’d never been out of the state. Only been to Bangor once. That was the time the bull moose wandered into town and was chased into the hardware store by the school children.

Camden left for New York. Two weeks later he come back and Mayor Johnson thought it was fitting to have a reception committee, band and all. When Camden stepped onto the platform, the mayor asked, “How’d you like New York?”

Camden answered: “There was so much goin’ on at the depot, I didn’t get a CHANCE to see the village.”

Imagine the adventures Camden would have had if he HAD gone into the “village” of New York? Camden COULD have gone to see the Statue of Liberty, gone to a Broadway show and gone up to the top of the Empire State Building. Just going for a ride in a CAB in the City is almost better than a roller coaster ride. That is the way your life can be. If you have the courage to take a leap of faith, you will have adventures that you would never have DREAMED of having.

SO, taking a leap of faith is what the sermon is about this morning.

## 1. Let it be

Mary was engaged to be married and was probably planning her wedding. Then suddenly, one night, an angel appeared to her and gave her an opportunity to make a HUGE leap of faith. This leap of faith involved scrapping her immediate wedding plans and doing something no woman had EVER done before: conceive, carry and give birth to the Son of God. I believe that if Mary had refused, God would have made other plans. But Mary said to the angel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

God also gives each of us opportunities to take leaps of faith. When these opportunities come we can refuse to take them. Or, like Mary, we can say to God, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Let me introduce you to Dennise Sellers. She wrote a true life article for *Guideposts* that appeared in the August 2010 edition ("Never Too Late" p. 55ff):

Another Saturday night, and the restaurant where I waitressed was packed. I waved hello to a few of our regulars, tied on my apron, grabbed a pen and pad and headed to my first table of the night: a gray haired woman and her four grown children. I hadn't seen them in here before. "Welcome. My name is Dennise, and I'll be your server," I said, launching into my new-customer spiel. The woman and I chatted about the weather and the Syracuse Orange, whose uniforms and banners hung from the walls.

I'd started waitressing 20 years earlier. Back then it was the perfect job. I was a young newlywed and I liked the hustle and bustle—juggle 13 tables? No problem. When my husband and I had our daughter, Holly, I switched to the night shift so I could pick her up from school and spend time with her in the afternoon. Now I was 42, divorced and Holly was finishing high school. I was grateful to God for having a job, especially a job I liked. But lately I'd been feeling restless. Like I needed a change.

Then three of my young coworkers enrolled in nursing school. ...The more I listened to them, the more I thought of becoming a nurse myself. ...Then I prayed: "Lord, I feel like there's something more out there for me, maybe even a new career. Please point me in the right direction."

Who's life is it anyway? Is it yours' to do with as you please? Or is your life a gift from God to be used the way God INTENDED you to use it? If you say to God, as Dennise did, "God, point me in the right direction," or if you say to God, as Mary did, "Let it be with me according to your word," God WILL guide and direct you toward the next step of faith you are to take.

## 2. Confirmation

How do you know that it is God who is telling you which way to go? There are several ways to discern the difference between God's will and your will and between God's will and the will of other people.

a. The first is the Bible, God's Word. God will never ask you to do something that is forbidden in Scripture. God will never tell you to stop worshiping God or stop praying or stop reading the Bible or stop helping those in need.

b. God will not tell you to do anything that will hurt innocent people. The married man who had an affair with a married woman and destroyed both families may have been hearing someone, but it WASN'T the Lord.

c. When you DO hear God, God will also confirm it through other faithful people. That is what happened to Mary. In the text we read that Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth who, as we heard last week, was miraculously pregnant with the baby who was to be John the Baptist. What confirmation this must have been to Mary!

Let's see how Dennise's path was confirmed. When she asked her daughter what she thought of her becoming a nurse, here was Holly's reply:

"Are you kidding, Mom? You'd make a great nurse! I've never seen anyone work as hard as you. You're always there for me, and I know you'll be there for any patient of yours too."

This gave Dennise a temporary boost, but that night at work she began to doubt if she could handle all the course work in biology and chemistry. Then...

"Dennise, pick up!" a voice bellowed. I snapped back to reality. I thanked the cook, grabbed the plates and headed over to my table. The gray-haired woman and her family studied me with more than usual interest while I set their meals in front of them. One of her sons nudged her. "Mom, tell her what you just told me."  
... "Well, I was just saying that you would make a wonderful nurse," she said.

"A...a nurse?" I was taken aback.

"That's right. I've been a nurse myself for thirty years, and I've been watching you. With your outgoing personality and the energetic way you work, you definitely have what it takes."

"Thank you," I said. On my way to the next table I added silently, *Thank you, God. I couldn't have gotten a clearer sign!* ...If you are going in the direction God wants you to go, God will give you clear signs of confirmation along the way.

### 3. Fear

Along with the confirmations will also come doubts and fears. Sometimes these come from people who are NOT in the Lord, but usually they come from inside us. With every opportunity to take a leap of faith, there is a sense of risk, the fear of failure, worry about change and fear of the unknown.

Dennise certainly had these fears. She writes:

I was middle aged. I should've found my path by now. And if I hadn't, wasn't it too late to start over? Besides, I didn't even know if any nursing school would accept me. I'd fallen in with a questionable crowd in high school and dropped out. I straightened up and got my GED, but I didn't exactly have a stellar academic record. And what did I know about nursing? The only time I had been in the hospital was when I'd had Holly. Suppose I spent the money and effort on nursing school only to discover that I fainted at the sight of blood?

God understands the fact that we are apprehensive about leaps of faith. That is why the command most often given by God throughout the Bible is this: "Be not afraid." When the angel appeared to Mary and told her that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear a son who would be called the Son of God, he also said: "Be not afraid."

As a matter of fact, the angel said a little MORE than that. He said, "Be not afraid, MARY." The fact that the angel knew Mary's name must have been comforting to her. And God knows YOUR name, for these words from Isaiah 43 are for you:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by NAME, you are mine.  
<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. <sup>3</sup>For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

How can we NOT fear? We only need to remember that God knows our name. In fact, God knows every single cell in our bodies. And, God says, "I will be with you." When God is with us, and we KNOW God is with us, we can face anything—even death. That is why King David could write, in Psalm 23, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

Don't be afraid to start tithing.

Don't be afraid to serve on a committee.

Don't be afraid to teach Sunday school (K→5<sup>th</sup>, 1 month at a time).

Don't be afraid to start a new career.

Don't be afraid to come to adult Sunday school.

Don't be afraid to come and sing in the choir.

Don't be afraid to ask Jesus into your heart and life if you haven't already.

The book we have been using in adult seminars is titled *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel. Strobel was the legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune* for many years. He had a law degree from Yale and he looked at things from a legal and scientific perspective. He was also an atheist.

When his wife became a Christian, and Strobel saw the positive changes in her life and he decided to do some scientific research to determine whether Jesus was, or was not, the Son of God and whether Jesus HAD BEEN resurrected and WAS alive today.

Strobel traveled around the world interviewing scholars to make his determination. One of those he interviewed was J. P. Moreland. Moreland is a well-known philosopher with a doctorate from the University of Southern California. He also has a background in science and a chemistry degree from the University of Missouri. When asked by Strobel if he had had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, this is what he said:

“In 1968 I was a cynical chemistry major at the University of Missouri, when I was confronted with the fact that if I examined the claims of Jesus Christ critically but with an open mind, there was more than enough evidence for me to believe it. ...So I took a leap of faith in the same direction as the evidence was pointing, by receiving Jesus as my forgiver and leader, and I began to relate to him—to the resurrected Christ—in a very real and ongoing way. ...In three decades I’ve had hundreds of specific answers to prayers, I’ve had things happen that simply cannot be explained by natural explanations, and I have experienced a changed life beyond anything I could have imagined.”

Do not be afraid to take a leap of faith and ask Jesus into your heart and life as J. P. Moreland did and as Lee Strobel did after he completed his research.

#### Conclusion – Dreams can come true

Dennise took a huge leap of faith and her dream came true. She passed every single one of her exams and she writes: “In March 2005, at age 44, I became a full-time registered nurse in the neurology department at University Hospital in Syracuse, New York.”

Mary took a HUGE leap of faith and became the Mother of Jesus. We are here this morning because Mary said to the angel, “Let it be with me according to your word.”

What would happen in YOUR life if YOU said to God, “Let it be with me according to your word?” ...Whatever it might be, the message of this Christmas season is Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.” Whatever leap of faith God puts before you, God knows your name and God WILL be with you—today, tomorrow and forever and ever.

Amen.