

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual*, No. 3

Abnormally Born

May 10, 2020 (video)

Luke 1:26-38 (NLT)

You know, one thing the upheaval of these days drives home to me is how reticent most of us are to change.

Most of us.

Not all of us. Some of us thrive in times of change. Some of us just love being thrown a curve when we were expecting a fastball. We love the thrill and the challenge of the unknown and unexpected.

But, most of us don't. Most of us prefer it when things do what they're supposed to do and follow an order that we're used to. We prefer it when our alarm clock does its job and wakes us up, when the toaster doesn't burn our toast, when our car starts in the morning. Most of us appreciate it when, you know, gravity works, as well as every other thing that makes the day go on as planned.

That's really – commonly – human nature: to appreciate a sense of predictability about life, and to tend to resist those surprising changes of direction – changes of schedule.

Why are we like that?

Well, I think part of it is God-given appreciation for the cadence of life. I mean, God made day and night and seven-day weeks and all that because there has to be some order to life. So, an appreciation of order is just part of being part of God's created order.

For some people, that's as far as it goes.

But for others, it's something else. For others, facing one of life's curveballs is a terrible thing because of an overwhelming need to be in control, or at least to think they are in control, which seems to me to come, interestingly, from the fall. In fact, I've wondered, at times, if the demand for control isn't one of the last vestiges of the fall to remain in even the most sanctified of our personalities – the need to be in utter control of my personal world, and to know all that's going on and to call all the shots as I see fit.

And that sort of need to be in control doesn't just affect large life changes. It is what keeps some people from being able to work for someone else; it keeps some people out of real friendship or sound marriages; it keeps some people from flying in an airplane – not really the fear of flying, but of giving control to someone else and the vulnerability that comes with it.

When you boil it down, isn't it the urge to control that the serpent offered to Adam and Eve? That's what really grabbed them – the fact that we can be like God! And man, it really holds on! Some never give it up. The need for control lasts until that point where they dying.

I've wondered, in fact, if that's not really when most people finally relinquish that urge – and even then, only because they really have no choice.

For so many, it takes either death or the threat of death to give up that last vestige of pride – that thing that the fall placed in us that says, "I don't need you – I can do this myself."

I think that's the root theological reason why most of us don't like times of change. Every time of change reminds us, to one degree or another, that there really is very little about life that we do control, and we just hate that.

Times of change force us to face our limitations. They cause us to evaluate our priorities and allegiances, and they drive us toward those questions that have to do with real power and authority and life and death – questions about the truly important realities of existence – questions of what it means to be a human person.

Times of change bring forced doses of reality into our lives.

Of course, that's not to say that all of that happens when our toaster breaks, or our car doesn't start in the morning.

Although, I think we'd be healthier people – especially we who follow Jesus – if, every time we're thrown a curve – even a small one, we could accept that as a reminder that we are limited in our power and our ability to see the big picture.

Just the same though, every curve ball that winds up coming our way should also remind us that our God is not limited in any of those ways.

We serve a God Who stands outside of time – Who knows tomorrow as though it's today.

We are subjects of the King Who is all-powerful; Who is taking history in a direction – His direction; and Who has promised to bring all things together for good for those who love and follow Him.

And even more than that, we who follow Jesus are children of a Heavenly Father Who is committed to protecting and providing for His family, and Who is in complete control of our world.

And you know, as we remember these things – as we rehearse these truths, and not the uncertainty and anxiety of the news in our hearts, God gives us the strength and peace to persevere, even when the curve balls come to us.

This sort of intentional remembering and reiteration of God and His character and His power, that's what we see time and again in the Biblical accounts of the lives of people of faith.

But you know, aside from Jesus, I don't think we can find any better example of this sort of perseverance and strength than we can in Mary, Jesus' earthly mother. This is why I'd like us to look at her response to the most "not-business-as-usual" event of her life – one that changed all history: the miraculous incarnation and inception of Jesus.

The book of Matthew gives us the perspective of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, to all of this, and Luke's account focuses on Mary's story. That's where I'll read for us – Luke 1:26 – 38.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named

Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail."

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her. (NLT)

The angel Gabriel's first words to Mary have been translated in lots of different ways through the centuries, and they have given us the *Ave Maria* and the "Hail, Mary, full of grace."

The phrase, "full of grace" or *gratia plena*, became the basis for the idea that Mary was so full of grace that she herself could bestow grace upon those who asked, or prayed to her.

But in fact, the idea of the phrase—it's actually just one word in the original Greek, *kexaritomene*—is not that she is *full of grace to give*, but instead that *she is the recipient of much grace*, which is why most newer translations translate this, "Greetings, highly favored one," or "you who are highly favored."

You see, this was a greeting that assured her, not that she is the *giver*, or *mother* of grace, but that she is the *receiver*, or you might say the *daughter* of grace. This was God telling her that He *has been*, is *being*, and *will continue to be* gracious to her.

Which, frankly, is something she surely needed to hear, considering the rest of the angel's message, right? Because the rest of the message was that a huge curveball was coming her way—one that would mean her life would never ever be the same.

And the honest truth of it is, her life would change dramatically for the worse in the short term. And by "short term," I mean her foreseeable future.

The news would be so shocking to her that Gabriel attempted another soothing word—the same one used with Zechariah, back in verse 13 of this same chapter, literally saying, "Stop being afraid."

Two words of assurance, because then came—as Ralph Earle calls it—"the shattering announcement" to a good and godly woman betrothed to a good and godly man.

All her life Mary had done the right; she had done what was good in God's eyes.

Yet her reward for her faith and purity and dedication, on the surface of things, would be a life of misunderstanding and pain. Being an unmarried expectant mother was a very disgraceful thing in Mary's day, because it suggested that she was immoral. The prescription of the Jewish law for her was stoning to death.

And of course, even if she were to appeal to the truth—if she were to claim innocence by saying her pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit, the charges of lying, heresy and insanity could be added. She'd be thought crazy at best and a liar at worst, because, with such a ludicrous explanation, is she thinking we're all idiots that we'd believe a story like that?

So, you see, this was the life God chose for Mary. A curveball thrown to her, not because of her disobedience, but precisely because of her faithfulness.

Not business as usual.

A radically wild idea.

An upset to tradition.

A great risk.

Certain condemnation.

An abnormal birth, to put it mildly.

It was a gift whose benefit would not be immediately realized. Quite the contrary, it was a gift that would be condemned by the very world to which it was given.

Why was Mary the one entrusted with this?

It was not because of her great knowledge of the situation, or her understanding of all the ramifications.

It was not because she could see the end of the circumstance better than everyone else.

It was not because she was particularly good at hitting curve balls.

It was not because Mary asked for this. She didn't want it. She didn't need it. She'd suffer greatly because of it.

God trusted Mary with this news and this charge simply because He knew, above all else, that Mary trusted Him.

You see, when you know in your heart that the pitcher isn't going to throw anything at you that you can't hit, it's amazing what that does to your sense of confidence and your willingness to take risks—and your sense of peace about how the game will turn out in the end.

I mean, it's almost like cheating, you know, when you find out that in the game of life, the pitcher is really on the same team as the batter. What a relief! Suddenly life's curve balls don't seem so overwhelming—since you know that the one in charge of them is really out for your good.

You don't have to guess what's to come—you don't have to figure it all out—and you don't have to be in control. You let the pitcher control the game—you let Him pitch and trust that He'll deliver to you exactly what you can hit.

That's the trust Mary had in God, trust that allowed her to say to Gabriel, in the face of great and potentially personally devastating change, "may it be to me as you have said."

We see the same thing in Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job 13:15; KJV)

Same thing in Paul, "Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." (Romans 14:8b; NIV)

What a great way to look at life—especially in times of change and challenge and difficulty! The one who is in control of this game is on our side! And He'll never give us something that we can't handle, and somehow, He'll use

everything we experience – even the not-business-as-usual experiences – for our good.

I hope you know this God that Job knew, and the Apostle Paul knew, and that Mary knew – and that you trust Him as they did, especially in these not-business-as-usual days.

He gave His Son, Jesus, so that you can know Him.

He's on the mound and in charge of this game. And if you'll surrender control to Him, life may not be easy, but you'll be on the winning side in the end, because He is trustworthy and dependable and always, always faithful.

Closing Song – *He Giveth More Grace*

Benediction:

It's just when He sees that we're at the bottom of ourselves that God usually comes to our rescue – because he knows that's when we'll trust Him completely.

It's when we give up our attempts at controlling things we really can't control anyway – that's when He speaks His words of assurance and hope and peace.

This is the way Mary lived – it's why she could trust God for a difficult season – a difficult life. She knew Who was in control, and she let Him be in control.

May the same be said about me and about you and about all who follow Christ, for the sake of our own peace, and so the world might know that our trust is in the Lord, and that He is in control of even these not-business-as-usual days.

May God meet you and bless you today.