



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

Trust In The Lord

Sermon – Pamela Fox

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Trust in the Lord with all your heart

Today we are celebrating Mothers' Day. All of us have had mothers. Some of us have very positive messages from our mothers and others... not so good. Last week was my mother's birthday which caused me to stop and reflect on the messages she gave me. Mum's name was Mary and she would have been 100 last Tuesday. Because of her abused childhood, Mum was a very anxious person and passed on messages about worrying unnecessarily. She loved me and did the best she could but I was determined not to continue the pattern of anxiety. It is a work in process but discovering Proverbs 3:5-6 was pivotal in my quest.

I found here a command... an integration of mind, emotion and will... and a promise.

The command is to trust in the Lord... not once... but to keep on trusting. How? *With all our heart* - integrating our rational mind but not just going with logic (*lean not to your own understanding*), choosing to acknowledge him in everything (*in all our ways*)... and then comes the promise - *he will direct our paths*.

Today, I want us to consider what it means to *trust in the Lord with all our hearts, lean not to your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths*. Most of us know Proverbs 3:5-6 and perhaps, like me, these are significant verses for you.

I find a great example of someone who trusted in the Lord constantly throughout her life is Jesus' mother, Mary, so I want

to pray that, as we look at how she dealt with her journey, God's Spirit might give us hints for our lives today. Are you open to joining me for this request?

To skim Mary's life is quite a task, especially in 20 minutes so I won't read all the verses. Some details come from tradition passed down through the years and some reflections will be from the Spirit in my life. I have divided the story into 'The Seven Cs'; so let's get started.

In the first chapter of Luke verse 26 we meet Mary in her home town of Nazareth. She was a poor girl, daughter of Ann and Joachim, in an insignificant town north of Jerusalem, near Lake Galilee. Most Christian writers see her as about 14, when she had this encounter with the angel, Gabriel, because that was the normal time for girls to be 'betrothed' (engaged) in the customs of the day. She would not have had great expectations for her life but she had exceptional faith and trust in God.

Her family was from the priestly tribe of Levi and her cousin Elizabeth was married to a priest named Zechariah. In fact, these relatives are very significant in Mary's story. Luke introduces them right at the beginning of his gospel. This picture is of a typical young girl living in Nazareth at this time.

Let's explore the different reactions between Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel and Mary's encounter with the angel

1) Curiosity not Scepticism

Zechariah: Luke 1:8-25

Although Elizabeth and Zechariah were very honourable, holy people, in Jewish society they would have been considered as

‘sinners’ because Elizabeth had not been able to have a child. Imagine how painful it would have been to be shamed on top of the grief of not conceiving! Add to that, holding the ‘priestly position’ in the town.

So when Zechariah was given the honour of entering the sanctuary and burning incense, with a whole crowd of people outside, the angel, Gabriel, came to him and promised that he would have a son, to be named John who would be great in the eyes of the Lord and turn many back to the Lord. He was terrified and, despite the wonderful news, he reacted with doubt. *“I am an old man!”* Zechariah’s response caused him to be punished. While anyone knowing the pain of infertility could empathise with him, he hadn’t been able to process the pain and disappointment, and it blocked him believing God’s message. It is really hard for all of us to work through our grief from the hard events of our lives and the consequence is often that we become sceptical or cynical or even bitter about God’s leading... So, Zechariah was struck dumb until John was born.

Elizabeth seemed to go into seclusion for the first five months. What you would expect to be a time of celebration after waiting so long for a baby, was actually a very silent, private time until Mary arrived.

Mary: Luke1:26--38

Meanwhile, when Elizabeth is six months pregnant, Gabriel was sent to Mary (v26-38). Let us explore the contrast in her reaction to Gabriel’s message to her. I’ve called it ‘curious’ because, although she is perplexed and asks questions when told she would become pregnant with a son *‘who would reign*

over Israel and whose kingdom would never end', her reaction is very different from Zechariah's. Once Gabriel explains how it would happen and also told of her cousin's pregnancy, she says, *"Here I am. May it be according to your word."* What a humble and trusting response!

2) Comfort and Celebration

Luke 1:39-45

The news Mary received would have meant shaming, ostracism and possible stoning for her but she doesn't go into self-pity about that. With her *trust in the Lord*, she just accepted God's plan... basically, "You're the boss. Whatever you say, I will accept." So Mary went off to Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth for the first trimester of her pregnancy.

This young girl brought comfort to her much older cousin and I guess she would have had lots of prenatal education while there. She was possibly still there when John was born.

I love Elizabeth's greeting in Luke 1:45 – *"You are blessed because you believed he would do what he said."* What a tribute to Mary's trust; possibly a comparison with Zechariah and her response. What a change took place in this visit - comfort for Elizabeth in her seclusion turned into celebration for the cousins. The baby leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Spirit. They both then knew, *'Nothing is impossible with God.'* How often other people's faith can build us up. We sometimes forget that faith isn't just personal.

Let's look at Mary's song of praise...

3) Clear Insight and Connection with the Promise

Luke 2:46-56

Her first words were of worship and excitement about her situation. It could have been very different as this is early in her pregnancy!

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour”

—no mention of how she might be abandoned by Joseph or ostracised by the town!

“He has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant ... all generations will call me blessed...the mighty one has done great things...”

Where is her focus? Not just on herself but on God’s plan. Although she would not have been taught in the synagogue like the boys, she would have celebrated the Jewish feasts and traditions (Sabbath, Passover...) and heard the stories of coming out of Egypt and a promised Messiah. She knew the Torah because, if we look at Hannah’s song of praise in 1 Sam 2:1-10, you will find many similarities.

Note how in this next section Mary speaks in the present and past tense about her son, rather than the future tense.

“His mercy is for those who fear him. He has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, lifted the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, helped his servant Israel, according to the promises made to the ancestors Abraham and his descendants.”

I was struck by Alexander Shaia's comment about this canticle of Mary: *'They are written in a declarative present and past tense as though the events they describe have already taken place. Mary walks in the equanimity of total faith, seeing the future as already inevitable and perfected.'*

I am inspired by Mary's faith and trust. She had originally heard from Gabriel and then put it together with her understanding of the Old Testament teachings.

4) Confirmation along the way

Joseph: A Soul Mate (Matthew 1:20-25)

Sometime in that early period, the Lord appeared to Joseph, her fiancé, in a dream and told him about the miracle of what was happening and the purpose of Mary's pregnancy. He also believed and trusted the Lord and took Mary as his wife. He became her protector, provider, husband and soul mate. What a confirmation of God's care!

He took her to Bethlehem and later to Egypt, then back to Nazareth where he set up a home for them and their family. They had at least six other children and Joseph taught Jesus his carpentry trade.

Shepherds and Angels (Luke 2:8-20)

On Jesus' birth, an angel appeared to the shepherds (the outcasts of the day) out in the fields, and told them of the Messiah's birth. They are told how to find him and identify him and, although they were afraid (with heavenly hosts appearing and praising God), they got up and headed for the stable.

The first people to worship Jesus were poor humble shepherds. Another confirmation.

Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21—38)

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple for the purification offering, they were met by a devout man named Simeon who had been waiting for the Messiah. He took the baby in his arms and prophesied,

“Lord now let your servant die in peace for I have seen your salvation.”

Then he spoke to Mary about the opposition Jesus would face as well as telling her, *“...a sword will pierce your very soul.”*

Anna, a very old prophet was also there and she too recognised Jesus and praised God.

Wise Men from the East (Matthew 2:1-18)

In Matthew’s gospel, a star announced Jesus’ birth to the illustrious Magii (of a very different social class to the shepherds). Mary and Joseph are probably in a home in Bethlehem by now, and Jesus is closer to two; we know this because the wise men’s encounter with Herod produced a cruel response to kill all male children under two.

For Mary: She saw rich and poor coming to worship Jesus and a response in the heavens with angels and a star over their home.

What was Mary’s response to all this confirmation. It is in Luke 2:19:

Mary treasured and pondered all these things in her heart.

She thought about them often and ruminated about their meaning.

5) Continuing Challenges

In the temple (Luke 2:41-52)

Most of us can relate to the challenges of teenagers. This story of Jesus, where he stayed behind in the temple in Jerusalem talking with the Jewish leaders, seemed to be the beginning of Jesus finding his identity as God's Son; it must have been challenging for Mary. Anyone who has lost a child would relate to her feelings as she headed back to the city, having found him missing. Three days later they discovered him with religious leaders in the temple. "Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere!" His parents didn't understand but, again, Mary stored all these things in her heart - she meditated, processed and prayed about the things she didn't understand.

At Nazareth (Mark 3:31)

Another challenging experience for Mary! Jesus had begun teaching and crowds were listening to him. Mary and his brothers wanted some time with him but he said, "*Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?*" He was trying to teach that anyone obedient to God were his true family but imagine the blow to Mary and his brothers? Another challenge to ponder/process/ pray through.

Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12)

This seems to me to be a rather special mother/son moment, but I suspect it had it's challenges as Mary works out her place.

Jesus has been gathering his disciples and they, along with Mary and the family were invited to a wedding in Cana in Galilee.

Mary has worked out Jesus' power by now and, when the wine dried up, she asked him to help. At first he replied that it wasn't his time, but Mary didn't give up and said to the servants, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" After this Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water and the water became sublime wine. This is his first miracle and by now Mary has more understanding of who her son is.

6) Crushing Grief

Joseph - Sometime after Jesus was 12 and before his death, Joseph passed away. While we don't know any details, Mary knew the grief of widowhood.

Jesus - It is hard to imagine the agony of a mother watching her son go through the humiliation, persecution and torture that Jesus suffered. Traditionally Jewish mothers wove a garment which had no seams and gave it to their sons when they left home. If Mary had done this, what would it be like for Mary to watch Roman soldiers casting lots for it? Would she remember the words of Simeon – "*A sword will pierce your soul*" as she saw soldiers piercing Jesus' side.

James – Jesus' eldest brother became the bishop of the Jerusalem church. He was known as James the Just (not James the son of Zebedee). In 65AD, tradition has it that Jewish leaders called him to deny Jesus' divinity. James did not comply so he was thrown from the temple parapet; they then stoned and bludgeoned him to death. News of this tragedy must have

crushed Mary's heart again. She certainly suffered great grief but seemed to find resilience and strength from her faith.

7) Changes Embraced

Last year we visited the ancient ruins of Ephesus. The main buildings in the city had been the great temple of Artemus, the agora (shopping plaza), the library and the three storey brothel, where men could have a variety of choices.

The guide told us of Paul's visit and his courageous teaching and how the Christian faith took off here. In fact, the church in Ephesus became second in size only to the Jerusalem church. Then she pointed up on the hill to the home of Mary, Jesus' mother. I hadn't realised that John had brought her here sometime after Jesus' death.

Can you imagine the massive change it would have been for Mary?

For 50 years (apart from the time in Egypt) Mary had lived in Israel in a country town, celebrating all the Jewish festivals, upholding their values, speaking their language, knowing their customs... and then John took her away to Asia Minor and this multicultural city with very different standards, different languages, foods, habits, people... How difficult for a woman at least in her 50's or 60's to make such a radical change. Tradition has it that she became part of the Christian community in Ephesus until she died.

Mary seemed to be able to keep embracing change. This is a challenge for me. But as you reflect on her life, what is the challenge for you? Her curiosity, her celebration, her clear

understanding of what God is doing, her ongoing confirmations, her challenges as her role changed, her crushing grief and finally her embracing of change.

Conclusion

Here are my 'Hints on Trust' which I will give you as a Mother's Day gift... but you can add your own learning from Mary.

Be curious rather than sceptical

Look for the bigger picture

Know God's written Word

Celebrate the positives

Ponder the significance of events

Process your grief and pain

Keep an open mind to change

May God bless you as you learn to *trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.*