

Scandal

The gospel today is all about women; and if the degree of scandal is measured by the juiciness of the gossip it creates, then we've got a humdinger!

Imagine what Entertainment Tonight might do with this stuff!

Elizabeth is a retiree, maybe Auntie Lani's generation!

Mary is a teenager, pretty close in age to my 15 year old daughter Tea!

And both of them are in a condition that neither of them should be in: carrying new life in their wombs — one in a womb too young and unmarried, another in a womb that retired and moved to Arizona decades ago, but nevertheless here they are: pregnant as pregnant can be.

Oh my!

Imagine the scandal, imagine the gossip!

No wonder the angel tells Mary: "Don't be afraid!"

It's not the angel she's afraid of, it's:

"What will the neighbors say?"

"What will my parents say?"

But the scandal doesn't end here.

This scandal is found all the way back through the genealogies that both Matthew and Luke give to us.

And like today's gospel, the most fascinating people in those genealogies are the women.

Like Tamar, who disguises herself as a prostitute, sleeps with her father-in-law and gives birth to twins!

Like Ruth, the illegal immigrant from Mexico, or is it Moab?, who sleeps with a drunk Boaz on the barnyard floor before they get married, and gets pregnant with the granddad of King David.....

Like Bathsheba, whom King David spied taking a tub on her roof top in all of her naked beauty, who has her husband killed and she gives birth to King Solomon.....and the list just keeps going, until we get to today; the newly pregnant teen and the already popped out old timer who meet together not in shame or fear, but in joy and amazement at the audacity of God.

And these two marvelous women can kick up their heels and sing songs of God lifting the lowly and telling the rich to hit the road because they are both squarely within the bloodline of the savior – not a line up of the pious and squeaky clean, but a long story of creative, sometimes cunning, sometimes brave, and always alive to life women who are immersed in the complexity and uncertainty of our daily existence.

This bloodline might be enough of a story, to simply marvel at how God brings salvation through the muck and mire of our messy human lives.

But the story doesn't end there, in fact it's just the beginning of the real scandal that God is hatching this very day, this fourth Sunday of Advent....

"So let's take a closer look – let's go back, all the way to beginning – and we shall see an even greater scandal.

Let's return to Genesis.....

To the very beginning, where the Spirit of God hovers over the waters of chaos, and God creates light and dark, oceans and sky, land and animals, and finally Adam, the Hebrew name for "humanity."

But humanity rebels and turns away.

God says, "stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – you aren't built to know one from the other or to grasp how truly hard it is to tell which is which and if you try, if you go there, why, you only invite a life of misery."

But of course we go there, and of course we try to this very day to say what is good and what is evil, all the while creating a mess out of this world because we almost never get it right....

And so we bring down on ourselves brokenness and toil and death.

And part of that brokenness comes to Eve, the mother of humanity:

"You will have great pain in pregnancy and childbirth."

The miracle of life, the gift of sex and the invitation to create, now it comes with a price.

Until only recently in developed countries, and still in many developing countries, the leading cause of death among women is child birth.

So what is the scandal?

It is this.

That the God who broods over the waters of chaos at the dawn of creation now broods over the waters of a young girl's womb.

The God who chooses to create the cosmos with the magnificent words "Let there be....!" now chooses to become a mere embryo, a zygote, a mass of dividing cells in a human uterus, so that we might be re-created.

"God comes into the world as a baby.

Naked and needy.

That's the way the Christian story goes.

And it's maybe not all that comfortable for us.

God doesn't come to the world looking big and self-sufficient and coherent, like an answer to a moral absolute, but looking weak and hungry, totally dependent on his mother." D. Blue, *From Stone to Living Water*, 121.

In Jesus, and unlike the days of Noah, God doesn't throw up his hands and start over, but rather God reaches all the way back to the start of our scandal, redeeming the curse in the very place it began: in the womb, in childbirth, in new life welcomed on the earth.

In Jesus, it is not only "God with us" but God "as one of us" who heals, redeems, restores...

It is the final fix for all of humanity, as God rejects our NO to God — replacing it forever with God's YES to all of humanity.

The scandal is mercy.

The scandal is hope.

The scandal is love.

Perhaps this is why, before we tremble at the scandal of the Cross, we pause to adore the scandal of the manger. -omar rikabi (paraphrased).

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