



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

ROMANS 16:25-27, LUKE 1:26-38

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT
WE MIGHT BECOME YOUR DISCIPLES AND THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

It's one of the most often repeated phrases of our pandemic time, two words: You're muted! How many times have you been on a zoom call, you toss a question out there, someone responds with something really important and invariably they're muted! It is so frustrating! If you have zoomed at all during the past 10 months, most likely you've been the one frustrated and, at times, the one frustrating others! By the way, pretending you can't get off mute is a great method to get out of a lot of things!

But let's be honest. In this upside down Covid time, let me ask you: Do you feel God is muted in your life? Perhaps you have been running so fast this Christmas you haven't had the chance to hear from God. Or the opposite, you're alone, the silence is deafening, including a felt silence from God. If you're not hearing from God, if God is on mute in your life, you're not alone.

If you take the Bible and hold the Old Testament with one finger and then the New Testament with the other, what you have in the middle is 400 years of God on mute. During those "muted" years there were no new prophets and no audible voice. Four hundred years of silence between Malachi and Matthew. Now, to be transparent, before the silence, God's people were unfaithful, marrying non-believers, not tithing, and neglecting the temple. The Jewish priests were not teaching people the ways of God. Four hundred years of mute.

This is why Luke 1 is so radical; after four centuries the mute button is lifted! God speaks for the first time! Mothers and fathers here, do you remember the first time your child spoke?

It was a drop-everything moment! Luke 1 is a drop everything moment! God finally speaks, through an angel named Gabriel! Gabriel breaks the silence! Who was this Gabriel? Gabriel is the first angel described in the Old Testament. His name means “God-is-my strength.” Reminds me of one of my seminary classmates. He was a former Roman Catholic from Long Island, his parents named him Gabriel Archangel Sinisi! You didn't mess with Gabe. And you didn't mess with angel Gabe, for he and Archangel Michael make up the guardian angels of Israel. But Gabriel's main function was and is to be the great communicator of God's will: the great spokes-person for GOD. Perhaps for that reason and some humor, Gabriel was declared by one pope to be the patron saint of the Post Office and the Telephone - communicating by unmuting! Consider...It was Gabriel speaking for God who explains all those visions to Daniel in the Old Testament!

And after the 400 years of mute, in Luke 1, God sends Gabriel to Zechariah, telling him he would be the father of John the Baptist. Six months later, God sends Gabriel to a twelve year old girl in Nazareth. God off-Mute now. Gabriel tells 12 year old Mary, “You will be part of the greatest heavenly invasion of earth in the history of the world!” This un-muted bombshell, from God through Gabriel to Mary, is so powerful that in 1908, St. Michael's Church added a Stained Glass window depicting that conversation Gabriel has with Mary. This encounter is called the Annunciation. Gabriel announcing to Mary five basic words:

- Favor
- Fearlessness
- Formula
- Fuel
- And Feasibility

After 400 years of quiet, God breaks the silence through Gabriel to Mary: “Mary, you have found favor with me.” God comes off mute to a young, poor female from the wrong side of the tracks with no outstanding credentials and nothing on her resume'. Such favor would have been reserved for mighty warriors like Gideon, Moses, David, and Solomon. Why is Mary favored? Because Mary is available and willing! Period! Gabriel says it twice...Mary you are favored.

Second, have no fear...Mary be fearless. What I love about the Bible is that it is so real and doesn't hide our humanity. Mary, as any pre-teen would be, is terrified! Gabriel comforts her with the most repeated phrase of the New Testament...FEAR NOT. You are favored. Be therefore fearless, for you are part of the Formula of the rescue plan of God.

The Formula is this: Mary, you are going to have a son. He is God, coming to earth through your body. His name will be Jesus, which means rescuer, rescuing humanity from sin. In other words, Mary, through you, Heaven will come down to earth. The King of the Universe will come in the form of a baby through you to rescue humanity. Now at this point, you can picture Mary searching frantically for the mute button! Turn this guy off!

No, God is on a roll:

- Mary you are favored
- Mary be fearless
- Mary, you are part of the divine rescue formula

And here is your fuel. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the equivalent to the power of the MOST HIGH! Mary, through the Holy Spirit you will become pregnant without a man.

Which means for God- all things are FEASIBLE! Nothing is impossible! Just as Sarah found out in Genesis, being told she would have a son in her 90's. The Lord said "Sarah, is anything too hard for me?" It's what God does, he brings life out of nothing! God fully off mute bellowing now!

- Mary you're favored
- Be fearless
- You will bear my divine rescue formula..
- The Holy Spirit is fuel
- All things are feasible

And Mary clearly has chutzpah! I know this because she has the last word saying: I am available. I am willing. In saying so, Mary becomes the very first Christian Disciple! A poor uneducated-pre-teen-girl is the first disciple! My friends, this is huge! After all these years, God is taking the Old Testament and building the New Testament!

Gabriel's five F's to Mary is what leads Paul to write that doxology we just read in Romans 16. What Gabriel reveals to Mary is a release of the secret! A fulfillment of the Old Testament! Isaiah 7:14, written 700 years before Jesus. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him: Immanuel...God with us!

The great mystery now Un-Muted! Thank you God for taking yourself off mute through Gabriel to Mary!

How does all this apply to your life? Perhaps you feel like you're in the equivalent to the 400 years of silence from God. You haven't heard his voice. If you were to be honest you would say, "Lord you're on mute in my life." Luke 1 teaches us three ways God is un-muted in our lives:

- Saints
- Scripture
- Spirit

Mary heard the voice of God through another. God often talks to us through others that we call 'Saints'. Saints like Gabriel who are truth tellers, not just friends who tell you what you want to hear, but believers in Jesus who will speak truth in your life taking God off mute. Listen to them! God clearly operates this way! Who are the Gabriels in your life? In my life, one of those Gabriels is my wife. Her voice often reveals God's voice to me. Listen to the Gabriels!

Second, God is unmuted through Scripture. You see, Gabriel reflected Scriptural Old Testament prophecies like Isaiah 7 and Micah 5 into Mary's heart. He spoke Scripture. Every time we open the Bible we are taking God off mute. If you were to say today; "But I never hear the voice of God", I would ask you: Are you in a daily rhythm of reading Scripture? That's his voice! God unmuted in our life through the Saints, the Scriptures, and the Spirit.

Just as Mary gave birth without a man through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit unveils the will, the power and the voice of God. I think of John 14:26: "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and bring to your mind all I have said!" The Holy Spirit speaks the voice of God.

So, applying Luke 1, we can unmute God in our lives by:

1. Listening to the Gabriel's and saints in our lives
2. Reading Scripture Daily
3. Asking the Holy Spirit to reveal God's voice

But finally, the second way to apply Luke 1 is this. Now, for this application I need to take you to that Arby's commercial: We have the MEAT! Yes, we have the meat! We have the Divine Formula of Jesus operating through us. If like Mary you are available and willing, then you too are:

- Favored
- Therefore be Fearless
- Knowing you are Part of the divine rescue formula..to be the hands eyes and ears of Jesus on earth!
- Through the Fuel of the Holy Spirit
- Where all things are feasible..

There is nothing God can't do through you! But one thing has to happen in your Life. YOU have to take Yourself off mute, to tell the world! We like Mary have favor to do this. We are to be fearless. We have the fuel. It's all possible! And like then, so much is on the line. Do you remember during the first wave of Covid, how St. Michael's closed our doors and went on video, just as thousands of other churches did. Churches, shut. People muted!

Tragically, it was during that time that violence went up around the country. Loneliness and depression sky rocketed. My friends this Christmas with God Un-muted in our lives through Saints, Scripture and Spirit, and knowing you have favor, take a risk! Unmute yourself to take this message to the world!

Let us pray.