

# Mark Our Word

December, 2009

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## Small Things and Possibility: An Advent Reflection

-Dennis Bratcher

We live in a world in which bigger and better define our expectations for much of life. We have become so enamored by super size, super stars, and high definition that we tend to view life through a lens that so magnifies what we expect out of the world that we tend not to see potential in small things. But as the prophet Zechariah reminds us (Zech 4:10), we should not "despise the day of small things," because God does some of his best work with small beginnings and impossible situations.

It is truly a humbling experience to read back through the Old Testament and see how frail and imperfect all the "heroes" actually are. Abraham, the coward who cannot believe the promise. Jacob, the cheat who struggles with everybody. Joseph, the immature and arrogant teen. Moses, the impatient murderer who cannot wait for God. Gideon, the cowardly Baal-worshipper. Samson, the womanizing drunk. David, the power abusing adulterer. Solomon, the unwise wise man. Hezekiah, the reforming king who could not quite go far enough. And finally, a very young Jewish girl from a small village in a remote corner of a great empire.

It never ceases to amaze me that God often begins with small things and inadequate people. It certainly seems that God could have chosen "bigger" things and "better" people to do His work in the world. Yet if God can use them, and reveal Himself through them in such marvelous ways, it means that He might be able to use me, inadequate, and unwise, and too often lacking in faith that I am. And it means that I need to be careful that I do not in my own self-righteousness put limits on what God can do with the smallest things, the most unlikely of people, in the most hopeless of circumstances. I think that is part of the wonder of the Advent Season.

Both the season of Advent and the season of Lent are about hope. It is not just hope for a better day or hope for the lessening of pain and suffering, although that is certainly a significant part of it. It is more about hope that human existence has meaning and possibility beyond our present experiences, a hope that the limits of our lives are not nearly as narrow as we experience them to be. It is not that *we* have possibility in ourselves, but that *God* is a God of new things and so all things are possible (Isa 42:9, Mt 19:26, Mk 14:36)

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God's people in the first century wanted Him to come and change their oppressive circumstances, and were angry when those immediate circumstances did not change. But that is a short sighted view of the nature of hope. Our hope cannot be in circumstances, no matter how badly we want them or how important they are to us. The reality of human existence, with which the Book of Job struggles, is that God's people experience that physical existence in the same way that others do. Christians get sick and die, Christians are victims of violent crimes, and Christians are hurt and killed in traffic accidents, bombings, war, and in some parts of the world, famine (see *The Problem of Natural Evil*).

If our hope is only in our circumstances, as we define them to be good or as we want them to be to make us happy, we will always be disappointed. That is why we hope, not in circumstances, but in God. He has continually, over the span of four thousand years, revealed himself to be a God of newness, of possibility, of redemption, the recovery or transformation of possibility from endings that goes beyond what we can think or even imagine (Eph 3:2). The best example of that is the crucifixion itself, followed by the resurrection. That shadow of the cross falls even over the manger.

Yet, it all begins in the hope that God will come and come again into our world to reveal himself as a God of newness, of possibility, a God of new things. This time of year we contemplate that hope embodied, enfleshed, incarnated, in a newborn baby, the perfect example of newness, potential, and possibility. During Advent, we groan and long for that newness with the hope, the expectation, indeed the faith, that God will once again be faithful to see our circumstances, to hear our cries, to know our longings for a better world and a whole life (Ex 3:7). And we hope that as he first came as an infant, so he will come again as King!

My experience tells me that those who have suffered and still hope understand far more about God and about life than those who have not. Maybe that is what hope is about: a way to live, not just to survive, but to live authentically amidst all the problems of life with a Faith that continues to see possibility when there is no present evidence of it, just because God is God. That is also the wonder of Advent.

### The Gift

The dearest gift on Christmas day is not  
beneath the tree.  
It's one that doesn't need a box  
That matters most to me  
No pretty wrapping or shiny bow  
Adorns that wondrous gift.  
It fills my heart with peace and joy  
and gives my soul a lift!  
What gift could possibly be so grand  
That gives me everything?  
It's a baby Boy, born this day -  
My Savior, Lord and King!



**St. Mark's is pleased to announce that The Rev. Karen L. Lovelace has been called to serve as the permanent part-time pastor.** The congregation called Rev. Lovelace on Sunday, November 29, 2009.

Rev. Lovelace was born and raised in Hampden until the age of 6 when her family relocated to the suburbs in the Parkville/Carney area. She has been married for almost 25 years to Paul A. Lovelace, who was originally from Dulaney Valley; they are living in Timonium and have relatives living at every exit of the Baltimore Beltway.

Rev. Lovelace has a daughter from a previous marriage, Meghan who is 31 and lives with her partner, Nikolas, in Ellicott City. Paul and Karen have a 22 year old son, Timothy, who lives in Ashburn, Virginia.

For 32 years Karen was employed at various banks in different capacities. She has served as a documentation specialist, payroll supervisor, and project manager, among other duties.

Rev. Lovelace earned a Master of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary in 2007 and was ordained on October 12, 2007 through the Lancaster Association of the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ. Her last pastoral call was with First Reformed UCC in Vandergrift, PA.

Her hobbies include: reading, sewing, quilting, gardening, drinking coffee from Starbucks and riding roller coasters at theme parks.

She says her best qualities are compassion and mercy, integrity, a strong work ethic and an outrageous sense of humor. The thing she would change about herself is her need to make lists for everything she does.

**WELCOME**

**KAREN AND PAUL!**



## In our Thoughts and Prayers

Joan Fogle	Cynthia North
Kathy Chrystal	Margaret King
Matthew & Michael Keeney	Rosalie Powers
Martha O'Meara	Bob Foote
Timmy Hargodon	Mark Matthews
Mary Carrigan, recovering from knee surgery	

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Frieda Polcak 12/02  
Barbara Francis 12/30



### READERS

12/6 Alta  
12/13 Priscilla  
12/20 Rudy  
12/27 Anna

### GREETERS

Dan  
Gail  
Frieda & Rudy  
Gail

### TREATERS

Cathy K  
Special Luncheon  
Sue  
Anna



### Food Pantry.....

St. Mark's will be hosting a food pantry for any family in need on the third Monday of each month from 9 a.m. -12 p.m. thanks to St. Vincent de Paul Society. Bags will consist of canned vegetables, canned fruit, canned meat and cereal. Food will be distributed free according to family size per St. Vincent de Paul guidelines.

### ALSO NEEDED: TOILET PAPER AND LIQUID HAND SOAP



Thanks to everyone who donated turkeys, food, and money toward the Thanksgiving boxes.  
A special thanks to Gail Matthews for coordinating this project!

# December 2009

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p><b>On December 13, the Whaley family will entertain us with a wonderful Christmas program. We will have a light lunch before the program. Tell your friends.</b></p>		<p>1 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>2 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>3 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5 7:30 p.m. NA</p>
<p>6 10 a.m. worship</p>	<p>7 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>8 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>9 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>10 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12 7:30 p.m. NA</p>
<p>13 10 a.m. worship 12n Luncheon 1:30p.m. <b>Whaley Christmas Program</b></p>	<p>14 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>15 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>16 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>17 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19 7:30 p.m. NA</p>
<p>20 10 a.m. worship Christmas Fund offering</p>	<p>21 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>22 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>23 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>24 Christmas Eve Worship 7:30 p.m.</p>	<p>25 </p>	<p>26 7:30 p.m. NA</p>
<p>27 10 a.m. worship</p>	<p>28 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>29 5 -8:30 p.m. GED classes</p>	<p>30 7:30 p.m. NA</p>	<p>31 New Year's Eve</p>	<p><b>UNITED MINISTRIES RESOLUTION RUN/WALK – JANUARY 1, 2010</b></p> <p><b>HOMEMADE COOKIES ARE NEEDED – SEE SHEILA FOR DETAILS</b></p>	