

Two weeks ago, 300 of you turned in a green card on which you wrote, “I have offered my body as a living sacrifice to God.” You were saying, “My life is not about me. It’s about Christ. I want to have sufficient courage to magnify Christ in my life whether by life or by death.” I am one of you, and whatever the world out there thinks about us, I believe that such devotion is as sane as sunlight on water. It’s the life of God in the soul of man.

I’ll tell you something else about people who offer their bodies to God like that. They are the last people to think they have arrived. They feel more sharply than most people how far short they fall in their devotion to Christ. But they keep coming back for more. They say to the Lord, **I stretch out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land** – Psalm 143:6.

If you haven’t offered your body to God as a living sacrifice, I hope you will one day. Don’t be surprised if, without warning, you feel God saying to you, “Come on. I’m waiting. Give yourself to me.” In the meantime I believe every one of you has a hankering to know God better.

Wherever you are on the journey, I offer this Communion mediation as an encouragement to soldier on in joy and hope. It’s the story about Zechariah, a priest, and his wife, Elizabeth, the daughter of a priest, who **were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly** – Luke 1:6.

Zechariah and the Angel

Verse 7 reports their very public embarrassment. **But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren: and they were both well along in years.**

Zechariah went to work in the Jerusalem temple at regular intervals. He was standing alone at the altar of incense, and an angel appeared to him. He had one message for Zechariah. Verse 13 sums it up. **“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.”**

The angel told Zechariah extraordinary things about the man his son would grow up to be. He may as well have been talking to a stone wall. The old man couldn’t get beyond his biology. Verse 18: **How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.** You’d think he saw an angel everyday, talking like that.

Angels apparently do not like to be trifled with. Verses 19-20: **“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.** How’s that for assurance, if assurance is what you want?”

Zechariah and the People

Verse 21: **Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple,** and says verse 22, **when he came out, he could not speak to them.** He remained mute for nine months.

The rest of verse 22 is really interesting eyewitness evidence. **They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.** They talked about that for days on end in the village.

Elizabeth

What happened next is enough to give a skeptic nightmares. Verses 23-24: **When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.** Wouldn't you, if you were 65 years old and had a baby bump?

Apropos of her uprightness, Elizabeth gave glory to God. Verse 25: **“The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”**

The angel, John's enduring inability to speak, and Elizabeth's pregnancy in old age filled their life with meaning. Embedded in that meaning is meaning for us. That is where the joy and encouragement come from that I promised you.

Longing for God

Who knew that events that have shaped human history would begin with an old man saying his prayers in the temple of God? That's how God carries forward His purpose in human life. Just when you think He has forgotten, just when you think your situation is hopeless, those are moments to remember that somewhere, out of sight, God is at work preparing to bless us in ways we don't expect.

His kingdom is coming, and all the folly in the human heart can no more stop it than a One-Way sign pointing to the beach can stop a storm surge. Unlike a storm surge, God loves to work incognito. He loves to do what no one expects with improbable people, preferably in impossible situations, often after most people have given up.

What He does on a grand scale, He does in miniature. He is at work in your life. What do you want God to do for you? If your faith in Christ is going to grow, I can't think of a better place for that to happen than in some impossible situation. Here's what you need to do.

- A. Tell God what you want Him to do. Tell Him everyday. Zechariah prayed for years that God would give Him and Elizabeth a baby.
- B. Be open to surprises. God's answer may take longer than you hoped. His answer may be different from the one you asked for. It is the surprises that change your life. Being open to God's surprises is central to trusting God.
- C. Get started and trust God. He's not a celestial Santa Claus. He's the God who created all things, and He wants to have a relationship with you.

Communion

And here at the table of the Lord we hold communion with the Crucified One, who in the ultimate, impossible situation “trampled over death by death.”