

“Giving Up on Perfect” - Luke 1:26-38
Pastor Burt Garwood – December 3, 2017

Everyone wants a perfectly planned life. I remember entering college thinking, I’ll graduate, get married, go to seminary, get a dog and buy a house. In that order. It didn’t go exactly as planned.

- One of the things that every engaged couple worries about is having a perfect wedding. I assure them that weddings become memorable when the flower girl or ring bearer does something unrehearsed that makes everyone laugh.
- We get uptight when a new recipe doesn’t turn out right and we end up ordering pizza.
- Our perfectly planned lives are full of disappointments, curve balls and the unexpected.

The movie Christmas Vacation, starring Chevy Chase and Beverly D’Angelo, is one of my favorites this time of year. The father, Clark Griswold, does everything in his power to give his family the gift of a perfect Christmas.

- The movie continues with the theme that every little thing will go wrong in your preparations for Christmas. From wrestling with Christmas lights...to getting locked in the attic while searching for decorations...to irritating relatives who show up for Christmas unannounced...
- The movie is one huge laugh after another. Except that is, for Clark Griswold. He’s devastated.
- Christmas doesn’t go as planned...typically. And neither does life.

Some of us gathered here have lost a parent or spouse to death. Others of us have experienced the breakup of our family through divorce or some other wound that has driven a wedge between family members.

- We are left alone to pick up the pieces and ask ourselves, “Where did my perfectly planned life go?”
- In the midst of the unexpected and perfectly made plans messed up, God shows up. No matter what is going wrong in life...struggles with your job, your spouse, your kids, your parents, illness, death, divorce, unemployment...God shows up.
- Christmas is the reminder that God enters our world of pain and does something about it. By being God with us, in the form of an infant in a manger...born to a young girl and her husband who hadn’t planned life this way.

Things weren’t perfect for Mary either.

- Most little girls start planning their wedding when they are 3. But a guy doesn’t start planning a wedding until after he has asked her to marry him and she begins to drag him along to taste the wedding cake and reception food and color choices for this wedding she’s been planning all her life.
- I know that’s stereotypical. But more often than not...it’s true! This is where we find Mary in Luke chapter 1. READ: Luke 1:26-34
- The virgin birth is a miracle from God and sounds so amazingly beautiful to us today.
- But it was a messy thing for Mary as this was an unplanned teenage pregnancy.
- How emotionally prepared is a young teenage girl for this unexpected change in plans? She has to figure out how to explain to her parents that she is pregnant...and it’s not Joseph’s baby.

- The angel didn’t leave her with a signed note from God that explains things to her parents and everyone in the village. He gives her the news and then he’s gone and she’s left alone to face the world with her pregnancy.

It’s easy for us to overlook this because we know how the story ends.

- The virgin birth gets all wrapped in a pretty bow for us every Christmas with carols and the reading of the birth of Jesus and everything seems so perfect.
- But it wasn’t. The pregnancy would have brought shame. Joseph was ready to get rid of her quietly. Life just got very complicated for this young teenaged girl.

There are at least two things in the angel’s message that breathe hope into Mary’s life.

1. God Favors You. READ: Luke 1:30

- God doesn’t favor you because of your perfect plans. God simply loves you...no matter what. “You have found favor with God.”
- That’s what a child gets from his or her parents. No matter what my kids do, and I did a lot of bad things when I was growing up myself, my kids still have my favor...and I still found my parents’ favor.
- It’s the same with God. No matter what has happened...no matter how screwed up life has become...You are a child of God. Therefore, God favors you.

2. God Gives us people to journey through life together. READ: Luke 1:36-37

- The angel points this young teenage girl to a mentor in her relative Elizabeth, who herself is also experiencing a miraculous pregnancy in her old age. Elizabeth’s experience would fuel Mary and give her hope and encouragement. That although the angel left Mary...she had Elizabeth.
- God puts other people in your life for exactly this reason. When you’ve given up on perfect...when you’ve tried to do the right thing and life still gets messy...when you’ve messed up or when things messed up on you...
- God puts others across your path who are either going through something similar or have been through it and have found victory.
- This is why it’s so important to be connected to God’s church...to be encouraged by those who have gone before us in similar troubles and for us to do the same for those a few steps behind us.

And finally, this: Why did God choose Mary? Because of her response. READ: Luke 1:38

- God knew that even through the messy stuff of life, in the midst of navigating the shame and ridicule of a teenage pregnancy and perfect plans derailed...this teenage girl would continue to serve God.
- Life isn’t perfect. And your plans won’t go as planned. That’s life.
- So remember this: “I am the Lord’s servant. No matter what messy and unplanned things happen, I will follow your will.”
- And know that Immanuel, God with us, is here to see you through it all.