

to change, but what does not change, what cannot change, what will not change, is God's goodness and mercy. God's steadfast love endures forever, it endures any circumstance of life that might befall us. Certainly Mary, as she prepared to become a wife and a mother simultaneously, needed that blessing - she needed to hear those words, that "good God" news. Have you ever faced a time when you needed to hear some "good God" news from a trusted source? Who do you trust to reveal/confirm/assure you of God's work in your life? Of God's steadfast love for you? Of God's unfailing mercy?

*Prayer: Thank you, O God, for trusted friends who speak of your goodness in my life. Amen.*

### **Saturday: Read Luke 2: 22-38**

In chapters 1 and 2 of his gospel, Luke introduces a trio of life-giving women: Elizabeth the faithful one, Mary who carries the one who is the Good News, and Anna the prophet who heralds him to all Israel. Anna is the only woman in the gospels to be called a prophet. She personifies the long history of an expectant people, those who have looked for the fulfillment of God's promise. She is an evangelist - the first to proclaim Jesus as the one through whom Jerusalem's redemption would come. Though none of Anna's words are directly relayed to us, we can understand, through her life-long devotion to the Temple, her steadfast prayers, and her praise for God's redemptive work, that she was a woman of deep faith and respect. How do you view Anna? Who first proclaimed Jesus to you?

*Prayer: God, help me proclaim Jesus, as the prophet Anna did, with faith and wisdom. Amen.*

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## **Sermon Notes**



**Series: B-sides**

**Sermon: I Shall be Released**

### **2 Chronicles 34**

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house [of foreign idols], he sent [workers] to repair the house of the Lord his God. ...the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses. Hilkiah said to the secretary Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord"; and Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. Shaphan brought the book to the king...Shaphan informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

When the king heard the words of the law he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, the secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found; for the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us is great, because our ancestors did not keep the word of the Lord, to act in accordance with all that is written in this book."

So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to the prophet Huldah, the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (who lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect. She declared to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the Lord: I will indeed bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the works of their hands, my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched. But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him: Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words

against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me, and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord. I will gather you to your ancestors and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants.” They took the message back to the king.

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### **Monday: Read Mark 7: 24-30**

Today’s reading is about a strong, determined woman who has a word of instruction for Jesus. She gives him a widened understanding of his mission. The benefit of Jesus’ ministry need not be *first* for the Jews, and *second* for others (gentiles, pagans). God’s mercy is expansive enough for everyone all at the same time. No one need be deprived or made to wait. It is not a matter of sequence but of simultaneity, she argues, as she teaches the Teacher that crumbs are enough to feed on for wholeness. “In her tenacity,” Sharyn Dowd says, “This anonymous woman won a place at the table not merely for her daughter, but for every gentile Christian who reads these words.” Is it surprising to you that Jesus might have learned something from another person? An outsider? A woman? What do you think this tenacious woman might have to teach us about the expansive mercy of God? Who do you consider an “outsider”? How might those “outsiders” instruct you or expand your understanding of the Christian mission?

*Prayer: May I be open to instruction from others, that I may grow in faith and mission. Amen.*

### **Tuesday: Read Luke 24: 1-12**

The first Christian sermon ever preached did not come from Peter or Paul. It came from the lips of women. When the women came back from the cemetery on Easter morning, they brought with them word of an empty tomb and astonishing news: "He is not here but has risen!" All Christian preaching begins here, and all Christian sermons are reverberations of this Easter news, first announced by the women to the apostles. The response? The words seemed to them like "an idle tale," "empty talk," "a silly story," "a foolish yarn." Some say the disciples didn’t believe because the word came from women. But a deeper examination may be that it is a word too astonishing to take in on first hearing. A word from God - even a good word - the great news of resurrection - is difficult to assimilate all at once. Have you ever heard good news that was hard to accept? What does the good news of Christ’s resurrection mean to you? Perhaps it is difficult to take in because it calls us to become preachers ourselves. It calls us to proclaim the good news with our words and our actions. Have you ever considered yourself a preacher of the Gospel? How might you proclaim God’s good news with your actions?

*Prayer: Lead me to proclaim your good news, O God, with my whole life. Amen.*

### **Wednesday: Read Genesis 16: 1-14**

Hagar’s story is important in the Bible. She is the first person in scripture visited by a divine messenger. She is the only person in scripture who dares to name the deity (El-roi; “The God who sees me”). She is the first woman to hear the announcement that she will bear a child, a forerunner of Mary who will also hear an angel tell her that she will bear a child. Hagar is the only woman in the Bible who receives a promise from God of descendants. In the midst of so much pain, Hagar dares to name God. She recognizes that God sees her when others don’t. She has the strength to follow God in trying circumstances most of us couldn’t imagine. What a strong woman of faith! When have you felt God’s eyes on you in troubling times? Does knowing God sees you give you strength to move forward through those times?

*Prayer: El-roi, help me to see you and name you, especially in times of despair. Amen.*

### **Thursday: Read Numbers 27: 1-11**

Rabbi Chai Levi called this a story of “Holy Chutzpah.” A group of disenfranchised young women, the least powerful members of the community, dare to step forward and publicly demand greater equality (not only for themselves but for generations to come) before Moses, the chieftains, the high priest, and the whole assembly. Their language, like their action, is bold; “Give us a holding among our father’s kinsmen!” What courage it must have taken to leave their assigned place in the tribe to go to the center of the camp, to the place of male leadership and authority, to demand justice. God’s response is remarkable. Rather than balk at the audacity of the daughters’ demand, God agrees with their proposal and changes the law! This is the only time in the entire Torah in which one of God’s laws is proposed by people - and by young women, no less. We, like the daughters in our text, have the ability to know what is right, and speak out against injustices. Do you sometimes want to make a bold statement for justice but worry about the risk? How might these bold sisters help you step out in faith and use your voice, your life, to bring about justice in the world?

*Prayer: Lord, give me holy chutzpah that I might work for your justice in the world. Amen.*

### **Friday: Read Luke 1: 26-45**

Elizabeth is a trusted revealer of God’s good work! Mary sets out "with haste" for Elizabeth's house. Something compels her to go. Perhaps it's to share this moment with Elizabeth, to marvel at the holy bizarreness of it all. Perhaps it’s the scariness of Mary's own situation. Whatever the motivation, Mary arrives, and the words of greeting are barely out of her mouth before Elizabeth is shouting with utter delight, saying: Blessed are you among women! Blessed is the child that you carry. Blessed are you, who believed. In these words of blessing, Elizabeth testifies that yes, Mary's whole life is about