

Sermon on Luke 2:1-38 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 2:1-38

Jesus works his good in and through regular events and regular people.

Today I want to talk about Bruno... Have you seen Encanto? A story that paints a picture of the need for Mirabel - the regular one without magical powers - to restore life in a house and village.

It's a heartwarming and vibrant story that reveals very "peopled" heroes. Regular folk helping, rebuilding, making things magical!

All of it wrapped in some catchy songs.

As good as this story is however, it is a pale reflection of a greater story, as all stories are. And this morning we've heard a vitally important narrative at the heart of God's great story of redemption.

The Christmas story. The incarnation, God taking on flesh, humanity. The arrival of the promised King. Jesus is born.

While angels and prophets proclaim the good news of who this baby is, what strikes me is the way God's plan unfolds in the midst of regular events of life among regular people. It might help us see our own lives and vocations, roles, passions and pursuits, with clearer focus. One that shines a light on that which is worthy, that is more than magical.

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Regular Events

God, sovereign, in control, over everything, takes the earthy route to bring about his plan and purposes. In Luke's telling of the story of Jesus we have a story of a baby that shines above the background story of the life, experience, in which Jesus comes.

We usually visit these verses during Advent, and while close on the calendar, this is an epic for any day. And what we want to focus on is that it is an incarnation in the midst of an every day.

Using the birth narrative to tell the story that God is actually still at work in your lives, the mundane, routine things, work, civil life, play, and you can make him known by trusting in him in all those spaces.

“In those days...” What are the regular events here? It almost seems blasphemous to suggest that the birth of our Savior was regular... but what stands out in Luke’s telling is that Immanuel, God with us, comes to into the dust and muck of a world where a census for taxes, work in the field and living with hope were regular.

We see it in a governmental decree. The prophet Micah promised “o Little Bethlehem” that from her would come a king. That this would be the location of the Messiah’s arrival. But in God’s impeccable plan, Jesus didn’t just appear in this “house of bread.” He was in the womb of a young girl traveling to this town because the Governor said they had to.

Jesus’ life begins by following the commands of the government. The Angel had visited both Mary and Joseph. They were aware of who was growing inside her. They likely faced ridicule for it as gossip spread. But they don’t take steps to change their humble condition. They don’t tell Rome “you can take your census and shove it! We are special because the Holy Spirit has come upon Mary.”

Through their regular obedience and the regular counting of citizens, God’s plan unfolds.

“On the surface, political reasons determine where Jesus is born, but the ultimate cause is the God who controls history.”

When people are at their most silly, they will make statements about whether Jesus is American or not... Luke 2 says no... he submits to the decree of Caesar!

Now this is not a call to blind submission that hampers giving to God what is God’s, but we should recognize that God’s plan happens, Jesus does his work, he extends his gracious good in the midst of regular life. We don’t need to force a

utopian theonomy, Jesus can further his kingdom, call wayward souls to himself alongside the regular messiness of human governments. Even California.

Job, after an excruciating experience realizes that nothing gets in the way of God's plan... "I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted." -- **Job 42:2** (CSB)

We also see it in the birth. This is the one experience every human has shared, being born. Some births are smoother than others. The process for some is longer than others. All are uncomfortable and painful. And each of us has been through it.

This is where God takes on flesh. Nothing is more human than birth. Gross and beautiful. He could have come fully grown on a white horse, yet he comes fragile in need of care. It shouldn't take much to convince us that God is at work in the birth of Jesus!

We see it in his circumcision. Following the tradition, being obedient to the religious law. Submission to the requirement for "days of purification." The spotless lamb is made to wait to be clean. Then his parents present him, their first-born child with the only offering they could afford because that was the regular thing to do.

And *we see it* in the work and routine of those in the story. Shepherds are in a field, the lowly where they would be, and saints at the temple doing what they always did.

Regular events that didn't seem to be the right setting for something so amazing. The startling angel chorus aside - everything here is happening in the regular events of life.

There is no infinity gauntlet to snap things right. There is no revolutions of political or military means. There are no mushrooms to put everyone in a trance to see God.

What there is though is blood and sweat, crying, labor and work, hopes, routine, going to the temple, regular events.

“Luke 2:8–20 (TWBCV15:GR): Luke describes a reality in which an encounter with the Lord is not reserved for Sundays, retreats, or mission trips. Instead, each moment appears as a moment of potential in which God can reveal himself. The daily grind may serve to dull our spiritual senses, like the people of Lot’s generation whose routines of “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building” blinded them to the coming judgment on their city (Luke 17:28–30). But God is able to break into the midst of everyday life with his goodness and glory.”

What Jesus works is nothing less than humanity-altering. Nothing will be the same because of this baby in strips of cloth.

“But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” -- **Luke 2:10-11** (CSB)

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!” -- **Luke 2:14** (CSB)

“You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples — 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.” -- **Luke 2:31-32** (CSB)

The redemption of Israel! We know how big this is. This baby will grow up, living a life of regular obedience for us. He will preach the arrival of the kingdom. He will be opposed and killed. On that cross, sin is forgiven, righteousness is given, and the King takes his place. Reigning over all things by dying and being put in a grave that wouldn’t hold him.

This should shape us to see Jesus at work in the regular events of our lives. The meals we share. The commute we make every day. The governments we find ourselves under. The schools, the work. Church weak in and out.

To know God is to know him in the regular, ordinary, the routine, the mundane, because that’s where Jesus, where the Spirit, does his best work.

He also does this work in and through regular people.

Regular People

Jesus comes to those we don't expect. We expect him to show up to Target and he comes to Walmart. He doesn't storm the castle or arrive among the elite. He is born to, and does life and his ministry with regular people.

“The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper. We must never forget that this is where Christianity began, and where it always begins—with a sense of need, a graced sense of one's insufficiency. Christ, himself setting the example, comes to the needy. He is born only in those who are “poor in spirit.”

We see it in Mary and Joseph. The harassed young couple. Unsure of what the future would hold. Cherishing the words of the angel and the things others say of this baby. Not royalty, not wealthy. “Joseph and Mary capsulized the mystery of grace—the King does not come to the proud and powerful but to the poor and powerless.”

We see it in the Shepherds. We love to glamorize Shepherds, every kid wants to be one in the Christmas play! But, “Shepherds were despised by the “good,” respectable people of that day. According to the Mishnah, shepherds were under a ban. They were regarded as thieves. The only people lower than shepherds at that particular time in Jewish history were lepers. Scholars speculate that the only reason the flocks were so close in was because these men were keeping the sacrificial animals for the temple.”

Lowbrow. Unclean. Just doing their work. Likely tending to sheep meant for the passover meal. Protecting spotless lambs... The hear, they see, and they praise God for it. The shepherds symbolize all the ordinary people who have joyfully received the gospel.

We see it in Simeon and Anna. Devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel - for the peace of the Messiah. Old. Anna likely over 100, from a tribe that of no renown, in the temple serving God night and day with fasting a prayers. “God reveals his secret purposes in history to humble servants who continually live in his presence”

The young, the working class, the old. Regular folk. And these regular people, they are the ones who make Jesus known!

“They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.” -- **Luke 2:16-20** (CSB)

“Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary, “Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — 35 and a sword will pierce your own soul — that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” -- **Luke 2:34-35** (CSB)

“At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” -- **Luke 2:38** (CSB)

For their good (they receive salvation, forgiveness, what they longed for), but not for their fame - there was someone else to know - they told of Jesus.

Living in DC there was a nightly reminder of the stark beauty of the capitol. Illuminated for all to see. But no one walks away from that view touting how amazing the spotlights are. It is the object they shine on that matters. This is us in the mundane of life. We get to spotlight something so much more beautiful than self, Jesus.

“To receive the good news of the gospel is to come to understand that, despite our background and failures, God reaches out to us with the loving message of peace. Receiving the gospel is not just understanding an abstract idea but it is believing by faith that the glorious God of the universe is now pleased with us and speaks peace into our personal lives. The result is release from fear (v. 10) and entry into freedom, joy, and an eager seeking after this Lord (v. 15).”

Regular people, given peace, hope, and salvation. Free because Jesus works in and through normal events and people.

This is who we are. We have regular jobs. Live regular lives. Have regular hopes and dreams. Regular aches and anxieties. And hopefully, we live expectantly because Jesus has rescued us.

In all of these things we can live to see Jesus work, to see him revealed, to see his kingdom extended. It is through regular people he brings about his renewal. We can live like Shepherds, like Simeon and Anna.

As a Creative Minority, a faithful presence... “Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships, knotted together in a living network of persons who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world.[” – Jon Tyson, *A Creative Minority: Influencing Culture Through Redemptive Participation*

“We often think that to have an impact we must harness the forces of earthly power. If only Christians controlled media! If only Christian ruled the nations! Yet God’s way is often very different. The gospel of Luke teaches us that God can take obscure and poor people and use them to transform the world.”

We are banking on it because... **Jesus works his good in and through regular events and regular people.**

As you live through regular events - **See Jesus**. He is reigning and at work. In the IEP meeting. In the line at the grocery store. During the exam. In the boardroom. While cleaning dishes and laundry. In calculating the radioactivity of an old satellite. In protecting a network from hackers. In the routine coming and going from church, in the prayers of a small group.

Look for Jesus at every turn. These are the place where he works.

Live. Free from the need to be exceptional. Be faithful, steady, clock in and out, help the least, love your enemies. Feast and party. That in our vocation, in our families, in our play we would bring the peace of Christ because we have received it, so that others would see.

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!”

In the closing scenes of Encanto, they are rebuilding their house and everyone is building together. Regular villagers. All hands at work.

Far better, we are the church, all hands at work, knowing Jesus and making him known. Rescued. Formed into family. For the renewal of others and all things.

“As you come to him, a living stone — rejected by people but chosen and honored by God — 5 you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” -- **1 Peter 2:4-5** (CSB)

Jesus works his good in and through regular events and regular people. Praise God!