

THE STORY OF MARY IS A CALL TO BOLD

Assembly 2018 explored the story of Mary and how this story called United Methodist Women to be bold. Assembly participants explored the biblical story of Mary, mother of Jesus, a religious, social, civic and cultural icon whose story is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of people around the world. Mary was a teenage mother, wife, sister and, later in life a widow. Her life exemplifies what it means to be bold--to be bold despite life's challenges. God saw in Mary someone complete, capable, and faithful. So, who is Mary to you?

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Mary always believed in miracles. She always followed God. But in her whole life she never thought she would see an angel trod down on the earth beside her and call her a favored one. And now, she was going to have a son! She had only met Joseph a short time ago, and if he heard she was pregnant, he would surely send her away.

But the angel said, "Don't be afraid." She said to Mary, "God is blessing you with a holy son, his name will be Jesus. He will be great." Mary was not confident that she could be the mother of a king-- Much less one conceived by the Holy Spirit.

But then the angel said, "Don't worry. Motherhood is a journey." She said, "Mary, God has chosen you." "I'm telling you, Mary of Nazareth, nothing is impossible for God."

Still--it was hard for Mary to believe this could be her true calling. She thought of Miriam, Esther, Ruth, the women she was following. Though she was a bit terrified, she knew she was called to serve the Lord. She said. "Let it be with me, just as you have said. I am ready to be bold."

Mary's life is an example of taking risk without knowing the outcome or reward. She made a bold yet costly decision to follow God in a time when voices of women and girls were muted by the oppressive social expectations of the time. That was her reality.

THE JOURNEY OF MARY IS BOLD DREAMS:

Mary's story is about two women, about two miracles, and about two extraordinary sons. It is a story of two generations—Mary is one generation and her Aunt Elizabeth is another. Elizabeth was a righteous woman. She always followed the path of the Lord. But she and her husband, Zechariah, could not conceive. They got old. Elizabeth was sad and lonely. But then one day her prayers were heard. An angel revealed Elizabeth was going to have a son. The angel said, "It's God's word." Her son would be called John the Baptist.

These two women were brought together, one seeking the wisdom of the ages, the other the freshness of youth. One preparing the other for the journey of motherhood and the other showing she still had so much to give, to pass forward and share. Each generation strengthened and uplifted the other. Each woman shared deep wisdom and blessings. In love and joy, Mary and Elizabeth celebrated together. The call to dream boldly is what moved Mary to say yes to God.

Today United Methodist Women walk in their footsteps—Bold dreams mean we don't ignore challenges. We are a community of women exploring the possibilities of mission. The call to dream boldly motivated Methodist Women to organize missionary societies 150 years ago. These missionary societies sent women to such places as India and China, working specifically to meet the needs of women and children. That work continues today—access to basic education, nutrition, maternal health and other medical services are still a priority in mission work. Human trafficking and labor abuses affect millions of women and children in the world today. To dream boldly means we cannot ignore these human indignities. We cannot accept indignities as cultural norms. The call to dream boldly for all of us today is a challenge to transform an idea into reality.

THERE IS A COST OF BOLD

Mary learned there was a cost of bold. Shortly after Jesus' birth, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said that Jesus would not be safe. The government ruler wanted to hurt Mary's baby because they knew his holiness would never let oppression rule. They wanted to hurt him. So Mary and Joseph ran so the government ruler could not find them. They were refugees in a foreign land, imprisoned by fear and death threats. They stayed far away until they thought King Herod's rule had ended. But then a new ruler came to power. A new threat. They were never safe. Never.

Mary was a constant protector of her child—a child whose very being made him a target for violence. But what price did Mary pay to protect him?

There are many in our society that require our protection—not just children. This could be protection from poverty, from inadequate education, from food scarcity, from joblessness, from addiction, from prison, from the presumption their very being is a nuisance to the status quo. These are the challenges we recognize in our society. But United Methodist Women are asking what will we sacrifice to be a voice for justice? Would we sacrifice our social status—what about our relationships with those with whom we might disagree? Would we sacrifice our safety, our security? Would we go to jail for something about which we feel strongly? Women protesting and demanding the right to vote did!

MARY TAUGHT US ABOUT BOLD ACTION:

One time there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" Then Jesus' mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. Then Jesus said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water, it had become wine. The steward did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew). The steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests

have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his miracles, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

So, what does this mean? There was dancing and laughing, people eating and enjoying time together. And then it happened—it was not the uncomfortable moment when the hosts discovered they had no more wine— no, it was the moment when Mary boldly told the waiter, "Do whatever he tells you." In a few words to the waiter Mary set the miracle-maker Jesus onto his own bold path. Mary's bold action, was an example of ignoring custom and focusing upon a need.

We have all had a chance to be the bold instigator. To say "no more" when faced with racism. To say "stop now" when faced with injustice. To say "I'll walk with you" when asked for a helping hand. To say, "I'll try" when asked to do what seems impossible. So often we have the chance to be bold. But so often, it is easier to hesitate just long enough for the opportunity to pass.

THE POWER OF BOLD IN ALL OF US:

For the past four decades United Methodist Women have assembled—because we must. We have come together because there is a desire to celebrate our history We yearn for sisterhood, for justice and for mission. We have been called, we have dreamed, we have taken costly risks, we have acted in unity and now we celebrate the Power of Bold! United Methodist Women come from many places, speak many languages and follow diverse cultural traditions and social perspectives. But the story of Mary has called us to be bold in action, powerful in love and willing to work together to turn dreams into reality.

We affirm a God of love. God sees us, people of great diversity in our minds and hearts. But we are all here to serve the world God created. God calls and we answer, boldly dreaming with God of what might become. Boldly dreaming of God's plan for us. Boldly dreaming because we know that everything is possible with God. Boldly dreaming because God proved that love overwhelms evil, truth overcomes death, courage brings forth new life. We boldly accept challenge because that is what people of God do.