

Treasure and Ponder

Christmas Eve 2017 Luke 2:1-20

It says that “Mary *treasured* all these words and *pondered* them in her heart.”

Treasure and ponder. Treasure suggests you’ve found something; ponder suggests you’re searching, wondering about things set in motion that are not yet entirely clear. That these two words co-exist in the same sentence is really intriguing, don’t you think? There is insight here about how to receive *Emmanuel*, God with us. Reminiscent, isn’t it? of Mary’s *Magnificat* when, upon hearing she would be the mother of Jesus, said, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” To treasure and ponder is to magnify God’s presence in the world.

So Mary treasured the proclamation of a savior. And what did Mary ponder? “If God chose me,” perhaps Mary wondered, “then do lower status people everywhere now have hope? How will the world change? What role do I play now?”

To treasure and ponder is to open oneself to the in-breaking reign of God in Jesus. It is to reimagine that creation and life have been inhabited and reclaimed by God, then given back to us as gifts and treasures, infused with his presence and his purpose.

And what difference does this make for how we view life?

Let me illustrate, or rather, let Megan illustrate the effect of pausing in life to treasure and ponder. First, Megan will play a major scale.

Not very exciting, right? One note after another.

But what happens if Megan plays that same scale - the same notes in the exact same order - as though the notes really mattered, as if they were treasures? It was said of Count Basie that he could make *one note swing*, all because he played it with feeling. Well, what if Megan just loves these notes a little more, ponders them, and puts a few pauses in between the notes?

Kind of changes it, huh? Did you recognize that? “Joy to the World!”

Which one of these is more like your life? Most of us tend to live life with the “go” button pushed. “What’s next? Let’s get on with it.” (intone C scale). Life is just one darn thing after another. At the end of the day we checked off a lot of things. But is that all? Where’s the beauty? Where’s the meaning? How are the notes connected?

Tonight, we’re all invited to disrupt the endless succession of life’s notes, hit the pause button and say, “I treasure that God has joined us *as one of us* in the madness of this world - in the blood, the sweat and the tears. I ponder what it means that my life and my world is filled with God’s presence, from my daily bread, to the work I do, to the homeless man I meet, Jesus is there.”

Let me share with you a trilogy, three examples, of treasuring and pondering and the difference it can make. This past fall we practiced treasuring what God has given us. One Sunday, our guest preacher, Rollie Martinson, invited everyone to pause and identify one person from their past for whom they were grateful, then communicate your gratitude to that person. Al Erickson thought of his former Young Life leader, a Christian mentor from his younger days, named Paul Hadley, and wrote a letter thanking him for the role he played in his own faith journey. A few weeks later, Al received the following letter in return, from Paul Hadley:

Hi Al,

Your card arrived just before Thanksgiving. Our whole family – two sons and their families – were at our table. Our tradition is to go around the table and share something we are especially thankful for this year. My selection was your card which I read to the group.

As one gets older – I'm 86 now – a haunting question keeps coming to the surface, "Has my life counted for something?" "Did I make a difference for someone along the way?" For you to still remember our Anoka days 50+ years ago was a real encouragement to Beth and me and I want to thank you for taking the time to write.

Paul

Do you see what they both did with the notes of their lives? they paused, they treasured, they heard music. They magnified the Lord, didn't they?

The second example was a few years ago when I was doing the children's sermon at my former church. I was telling the kids about my teddy bears that I would snuggle with as a child when I was scared or sad. I asked them if they had some stuffed animals to snuggle with when they were out of sorts. Hands shot up and I heard about all kinds of stuffed animals, from bears to dogs to pigs. And then Everett started telling me about his stuffed sock. And I said, "stuffed sock?" I was thinking, "Gee, sounds like some poor child out of a Dickens' novel whose family can't afford toys or stuffed animals." And then the boy's dad, who was in the front row, translated for me: "*Shark. It's a stuffed shark.*"

And so it went. The kids were so enthusiastic as they told about their stuffed animals and when they needed them, but it was time to wrap up and move on, so I said, "Well, sometimes in life, we need more than a teddy bear, we need Jesus, and Jesus is there for us."

I was ready to pray, but the kids didn't want the children's sermon to be over. Something about this they were treasuring. They had more to say about stuffed sharks and pigs and why they needed them. Then Opal spoke up, "One time I saw somebody in my room and I was scared and it turned out to be my sister, Addie." Everyone laughed! And they kept putting their hands up, waiting to be called on, straining higher and higher.

It's hard not to call on kids with their hands up, but eventually I tried to do the wrap up prayer again. They were having none of it. So I joked about how they should just stay up there for the rest of the service.

And all of the sudden, something jolted me into pausing. This was about a week after the Sandy Hook shooting took place. You know, with the school children. I suddenly thought of this and looked around at these kids who were about the same age as the kids from Sandy Hook Elementary. And then it hit me. for whatever reason, these kids didn't want to leave...*and I didn't want them to leave!* I just wanted them to stay up there with me. And so, with a lump in my throat, all I could do was put my arms around the ones who were close to me and sort of whisper, "let's just stay here for a minute." *I treasured them and I pondered what we were doing up there together.* Well, I think we were making hopeful music together with lots of loving pauses, inhabiting a space that was created by Jesus.

In the third example, Author Diana Butler Bass tells a lovely story in her book "Broken We Kneel." It's a story about a mother and child who ponder together how God's presence goes beyond their normal boundaries and connects people.

One day my daughter Emma saw a woman walking toward us covered in a veil and asked the inevitable, "What's that, mommy?"

“Emma,” I answered, “that lady is a Muslim from a faraway place. And she dresses like that – and covers her head with a veil – because she loves God. That’s one of the ways her people show they love God.”

My daughter considered these words. She stared at the woman who passed us. She pointed at the woman, then pointed at my hair, and further quizzed, “Mommy, do you love God?”

“Yes, honey.” I laughed. “I do. You and I are both Christians. Christian ladies show love for God by going to church, eating the bread and wine, serving the poor, and giving to those in need. We don’t wear veils, but we do love God.”

After this, Emma took every opportunity to point to Muslim women during our shopping trips and tell me, “Mommy, look, she loves God.” One day, we were getting out of our car in our driveway at the same time as our Pakistani neighbors. Emma saw the mother, beautifully veiled, and, pointing at her, shouted, “Look, mommy, she loves God!”

My neighbor was surprised. I told her what I had taught Emma about the Muslim ladies loving God. While she held back tears, this near stranger hugged me, saying, “I wish that all Americans would teach their children so. The world would be better. The world would be better.”

We in the church wonder sometimes how we are to survive in the 21st century. It’s right here. Treasure and ponder – gifts given to us like faith, hope, love and Jesus. Treasures like each other. To treasure and ponder such things together is what it means to be the church. When our souls magnify the Lord this way, we have joined God at work in the world. Amen.