

Sermon: Slow Cookin' Our Souls**Scripture: Luke 1:26-38****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: December 13, 2009**

Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

(French philosopher, scientist, and Jesuit in first half of 20th century)

Above all, trust the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law that progress is made by passing through some stage of instability and that it may take a very long time.

And so it is, I think, with you.

Your ideas mature gradually -- let them grow...

Let them shape themselves without undue haste.

Don't try to force them as though you could be today what time

(That is grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)

will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit forming within you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing that His hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete..

“Above all, trust the slow work of God.” This is hard to do. In a culture of instant gratification, it’s hard to do. In a society where so much value is placed on efficiency, it’s hard to do. Within a world-view where it is up to each individual to make a life and a living for him/her self, trusting the slow work of God doesn’t come naturally. It’s hard for two primary reasons because God’s work within and around our lives is usually veiled in a cloud of unknowing, we can’t know for sure if God’s working in our lives and if so how that is actually happening. And it’s hard because God’s timing and our timing don’t necessarily coincide and if you are anything like me they don’t coincide because I usually want something to happen faster than it does and its hard, as Teilhard recommends, “to accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”

God is interacting and responding to the needs and desires and purposes of our souls and while it is like our minds and egos are on a gas burner so we can turn up the heat in order to more quickly produce whatever we are wanting to produce, our souls are necessarily being worked on in a slow cooker, so that the juices of these experiences here and the flavoring of those genealogical aspects of our lives and the nutrients of these gifts and seasonings of those weaknesses can be drawn out and mingled together to form a delectable soul stew. Makes ya hungry just thinking about it doesn’t it? But it’s a slow

cooker, so we don't really need to stir it or check in with it or add anything else or do anything to it other than allow it to be. Hopefully you'll catch a whiff of it and at a certain point the aroma will fill your house and bring you joy in the thought of what is to come. But unfortunately our souls don't have a timer on them and we can't look and see how much more time is left before our soul stew is done and that's the difficult thing. That's why it can be so hard to trust the slow work of God within our souls, because we can't necessarily know it's happening or how it is.

The mystics of old would say that there is a certain delicateness to the process our souls are undergoing that needs to remain hidden from our conscious minds otherwise we would be too tempted to meddle with it. "Man, these potatoes are not getting soft, I'll just take 'em out and boil them for a little while and then add them back in." Or we might sabotage the process altogether because our conscious do not even want what our souls are going for – "wait a minute, I don't want brussel-sprout stew with mushrooms"... ok, I'll stop with the analogy. I think it's breaking down. But what we most deeply and truly want at the level of our souls which would bring us joy beyond mere happiness is not necessarily – and maybe we could even say, it's seldom – what our ego selves want for ourselves. And so the process God takes us through has got to be largely hidden from our conscious minds. Does that make sense? The dark night of the soul and the cloud of unknowing by which people have referred to the slow and obscure work of God in our lives is what is needed so that our ego selves, the part of us that wants success and achievement and accolades and victory (and wants it quick!) won't get in the way of our soul selves, our true selves, that really want love and union above all else, no matter how long it takes.

And yet there is this fine point, this thin place, where the land of our souls and the world of our conscious thought meet, where our conscious willingness and choice is required so that the mostly unconscious work of God can be done within us. And it's that place that is depicted in the story of the annunciation.

Mary, as the story goes, is visited by an angel who tells her that she is chosen by God to bear a son who will be a king, holy, son of God. There are no more details than that. The angel says nothing about the way this will look for her, a pregnant unmarried young woman, nor what role she will play in her son's life, nor what life as a son of God will look like for her child. There were certainly more questions and problems that such

a visitation must have engendered in Mary than answers and explanations. There were certainly more unknowns than knowns about what she was agreeing to. There's no way it could have been a rational decision on Mary's part, weighing the pros and cons and then coming back to God with an answer. Rather it was a response of love. "Let it be unto me according to your word." And love requires such a response. If there is weighing of pros and cons then you probably have something else other than love involved. The angel's request of Mary and Mary's response to God was not one of servant to master or worshipper to worshiped or human to divine, primarily, but rather it was one of lover to beloved. We tend to skirt away from the notion but the whole thing of Mary being a virgin is making this very point: that Mary and God were lovers, lover with beloved. And out of this human and divine union came the enfleshment of love, the one we call Jesus. But Mary had to say yes to Love without any clear sense of where that "yes" would lead her or what she was in for by consciously allowing the slow work of God. And what we realize as time goes on that with that yes, the slow work of God had just begun and so much more was being prepared – so much joy and so much sorrow would come out of that yes in the formation of the soul.

And that is the archetypal image for each us. God as the lover and our souls, our deepest selves, as the beseeched and beloved. Are we willing to be open enough, patient enough, hopeful enough to accept the anxiety of ourselves in suspense and incomplete in whatever situation we find ourselves at this moment, at this time. Are we willing to trust that God is working at the level of our souls, and that there is some formation of new life going on within us that we can't see or even know much of at this point but that will emerge at some point in the unfolding future and that will be worth the struggle and waiting, the patience and process? Can we say "let it be" with Mary. Has God failed us yet? What do we have to lose in trusting that God will not fail us in the days to come?

From poem by Tom Kinder

Mary magnified God's being
 As it moved through all the earth,
 Hidden still, yet she was seeing
 Worlds transformed by one small birth.
 Can we magnify like Mary
 All our heart sees of God's light,
 Give birth to the part we carry,
 Candles that transform the night?