

**Trinity: Compelled to Serve**  
**Sermon 4-30-17**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Luke 1:26-38**

*<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

**Message:**

(Play video at <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-call-of-christmas> Click on the "Mary" video) What happens when we say "yes?" What happens when we say "yes?" What happens when we answer the call of the Trinity? My first reaction to that question is, "Well...if I say yes, I'm made to do things that I don't want to do." God is somehow going to force me to do things that I don't want to do. Things that are going to push my limits. Things that are going to be beyond my reach. God is going to make me do things that are uncomfortable and make me look like a fool. God is going to make me sell everything that I have and become a poor man on the street. God is going to make me move to Africa and give up my nice lifestyle here in the U.S. God is going to put my life at risk. While all these things may or may not be true, what we fail to recognize is the other end of what God is going to do in your life because you say "yes." God is going to help you believe that you are more capable than you know. God is going to build a deeper relationship and trust with you. While you couldn't see certain things, God saw

the joy and excitement you would experience by responding to “yes.” He knew that your life would come alive in ways that you never imagined. He knew that you would experience deep abiding unconditional love because you said “yes.”

But what if Mary had said, “no?” I imagine for Mary this isn’t what she wanted. This isn’t what she imagined for her life. She was about to be married to a good and righteous man. Joseph was getting everything ready for their life together. He was building a home. He was getting the finances in order. He was making sure he had a way to make a living. Mary was preparing her heart and life to give to this man. I’m sure they both imagined the family they’d create. The joy of child-rearing. The intimacy and love they would share for one another. The wonderful life they had dreamed of. Mary could have had the perfect life as she had imagined it. She could have had all of her dreams come true. She would have a loving husband who provided for her and her children. All she had to do was say “no.” If she said “no,” what would have happened? Would God have found another? Would God give Mary no choice in the matter and make her carry Jesus in her womb? Would we not know God incarnate, Jesus Christ? It’s hard to say. But so much was riding on Mary saying “Yes.” Or as Mary says in verse 38, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” I wonder sometimes how much of the Kingdom of God. Christ reigning on earth. Christ reigning in our society. Christ reigning in our community. Depends upon us, the people of God, Christ in us, saying “yes” to God’s call?

One of the major themes of “The Shack” by William P. Young is this theme of humanity’s desire for independence. I remember being in college and my one close friend at the time was expressing her deep desire to be independent and fully self-reliant. As I thought about her desire for independence and I thought about my own desire for independence, I started to see some warning signs to that line of thinking. What does it mean to be truly independent? It’s something we probably desire from birth. A baby depends on adults to feed, change and care for them. But then when a baby becomes a toddler, the world is his or her playground without realizing the dangers that exist in the world. When a parent guards that toddler from touching a hot burner they get upset because he or she cannot get what they want. Although the parent knows that this is a danger to the child. Or fast forward a few years to an 8 or 9 year old, they may want to run off, play with their friends and do whatever they want without parental supervision, but we well know that there are dangers in the world that could harm that child. The worst of all evils. But they get upset because you won’t allow them to go unsupervised. And it becomes even harder as a parent as they become a teenager. The child wants to drive a car, go to parties and be alone with their friends. When, again, as a parent you know the dangers of the world. I remember as a teenager being so upset that my parents needed to know where I was at all times. I would drive from

friends to friends house without updating them with where I was at. I remember them being upset with me when I wouldn't tell them when I was going to be home. Or if I was going to be later than expected. I didn't want to be tethered to my parents. I wanted to do my own thing. I especially remember this after coming home from college and living with my parents for a few months. At college, I did whatever I wanted. I didn't have to report to anyone per se. And then coming to live with parents again to have to revert to those high school days informing them where I was going to be when and where was torture. I am an adult now! Of course, I didn't recognize this as care. I saw this as an invasion of my privacy of my independence. But here's the thing, while to develop the God image in ourselves. To recognize who God has created us to be apart from parents. To develop into adults is important. But if we are truly independent, we are accountable to nothing. And independence in its extreme means loneliness. And independence in relation to the Trinity or God, leads to brokenness. We make decisions that don't have consequences. We hurt others. "The Shack" attributes the evils of this world, not first to something demonic or Satanic, but to our desire for independence. Our desire for independence precedes eating of the apple at the tree of knowledge. Because if you think back to Adam and Eve, they first chose, apart from God, to eat the apple. The serpent may have tempted them and planted the idea that what they had wasn't enough. But they decided that what God had given them wasn't enough. They needed more. They wanted to do things their way. They want to do things on their own. And of course this led to all sorts of evils. Cain killing Able. Violence pervades all of humanity to the point where God institutes the Flood. And we know the rest of the story. So maybe the root of evil is our desire for independence. To be divorced from all things God.

I wonder what would happen if we were dependent and obedient to God? We tend to think of this as slavery, but it's not. Even as Moses is obedient to God, Moses argues with God. He pleads with God to change His mind on multiple occasions. And God does. This has less to do with whom is more powerful or dominant and more to do with relationship, conversation and intimacy. An intimate relationship cannot be demanded or manipulated. It has to be developed. There has to be investment from both parties. As we look at much of scripture, God desires to commune with us. The Father wants to be with us, his creation. Jesus, God incarnate, wants to be with us. The Holy Spirit wants to be with us. Sometimes we think of God's rules or laws as oppressing. Squelching the human spirit. But I had an ah-ha moment the other year. The Ten Commandments are not created to box us in. So that God can exert his power and oppression over us. God gave us the Ten Commandments to bestow knowledge. To freely give it. To lovingly protect us from how independence can lead us to unholy and harmful actions. He tells us to do these things because God deeply cares and loves.

And so Mary responding with “yes,” is a relenting of her desire for independence. Because she already has this deep, abiding, loving and intimate relationship with God. That her only response can be “yes.” Have you ever been there? Have you ever experienced God’s orchestration in your life to the point where your only answer was “yes?” When I went into seminary, I didn’t want to be a pastor. My professor even suggested it and I laughed at him. I thought, “no way. I have no desire.” But God planted an idea that day. I didn’t think I was capable. Every step. Every growth point. Every class. Led me closer to this idea that I needed to become a pastor. I tried to become a pastor right after seminary, there wasn’t a good fit. So God sent me into chaplaincy. Chaplaincy was good and helpful, but I found myself constantly applying the principles I was learning in chaplaincy to congregational ministry. At the end of chaplaincy, I interviewed for both chaplain positions and pastoral positions. God closed doors to chaplain positions, but interviewing with Providence continued to be the path. And simultaneously my relationship was developing with Christine who lived in Bryn Mawr at the time. Everything in my life was leading to me to pastor and to Providence. By the time you all called me to be your Pastor, I had no doubt in my mind that it was God and I obviously said, “yes.” My multiple yes’ in each of those instances led me to this place and to this time. I couldn’t have orchestrated it any better myself. Now, I’m sure I’ve said “no” plenty of times to God. But I never would have imagined being a Pastor. But God knew. And I’m so glad that I said, “yes.”

As Brethren, we are very familiar with this idea of obedience and service. We love doing service projects. We love going to work camps. We love serving camp. And if you’ve ever done any of these things, you understand this paradox. I recently read Thom Rainer’s small book called, “I Am A Church Member.” He notes this servanthood paradox. “...we will find the greatest joy when we choose to be last. That’s what Jesus meant when He said the last will be first. True joy means giving up our rights and preferences and serving everyone else.” As many of you may remember from Mark 9:35, the disciples ask who is the greatest among them. Jesus responds, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” Those who think they deserve something. Those who feel entitled to certain gifts, rights and to be first, are not the greatest to God. A person who understands God’s heart understands that they must choose to be last. That their preferences and desires do not come before others or before God’s. And those who understand this and understand the will of God, will experience great joy in doing so. Because if you’ve ever put someone else’s needs before your own, you understand that it’s not burdensome. You understand that it brings great meaning and purpose to life. You understand that its wonderful to give people love and hope.

Just this past week, I experienced that. I got an email inviting me to go to a pastors gathering to pray for another minister. Initially, I didn't want to go because it didn't serve me. I had needs that needed to be met. And I wouldn't have that opportunity at this gathering. Or so I thought. But in light of writing this sermon, I was convicted that this was an occasion to be last and bless another. So I went on Thursday morning to this gathering. And ironically, as I was praying for this minister and others were praying for this minister, God spoke to me in my needs. God started to help me see that I had similar needs as this minister. And by serving him, I could hear God's voice better. I started to see what I was blind to. I started to hear God in the midst of serving. And I came away with praise and joy. It's like, by serving Christ in another, I became more intimate with God.

Mary understood the joy of serving God in this way. She could have chosen not to carry Jesus. But she didn't because of her faithful, obedient and intimate relationship with God. She knew that her only and greatest response was "yes." Jesus acknowledges this in his ministry in Luke 8:21, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." So when we look at the Trinity, what does it look like to serve each person of the Trinity? What does it look like to serve the Father? Mary does it by obeying and following. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." What does it look like to follow/serve the Spirit? Mary allows the Spirit to come upon her. Protect her. Speak to her. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you..." What does it look like to serve the son? Mary bears the burden of carrying Jesus to birth.

What does it look like for us to serve the Trinity? First of all, do we have a relationship with God? Do we recognize our need for God? Do we recognize that we cannot breathe, move or do, without God in our lives? Can we speak with God? Can we listen to God? Secondly, are we willing to yield to the will of the Trinity? We may have preferences and desires, dreams and hopes, but are we willing to put those things on hold? Our independence on hold? So that God's work can be done on earth as it is done in heaven? Thirdly, are we willing to serve other people above our own needs and desires? Mary was willing to do this with Jesus. But are we willing to do it with the people around us? Speaking of church membership, Thom Rainer says, "Jesus said we must be last of all and servant of all. That doesn't sound like all the church members we may know. Many church members demand preferences, their desires and the way they've always done it." And this compulsion to serve comes out of our intimate relationship with God. It isn't something that we begrudgingly do. We don't view what God asks of us as burdensome. We do it because we are dependent upon God and this is an extension of our love for the Trinity. We are serving God by serving others. This obedience has the natural effect of providing joy. It's a paradox. We like to think

that when we put our needs and desires first will be happy. But the truth is, when we are willing to yield to others and be last, we find great peace and joy. Mary yielded to the will of God. She gave up her perfect dreams with Joseph to serve God. Where do you need to yield to the will of God? Where do you need to give up your independence? What is God saying to you? How can you be last before you are first? Amen.