

D.I.Y.
Luke 1:39-45
Embry Hills UMC
December 20, 2009

Good morning, and welcome to D.I.Y. on the Embry Hills Advent Network. Here on D.I.Y., we help you learn how to do it all yourself. Now, we have to admit that we can't advertise our program as "spiritual growth made easy," because there's frankly no such thing as easy spiritual growth. But, what we can do is help you understand more about how to take some of those really big spiritual growth tasks and break them down to size, so that your life can look like God wants it to look. Here at D.I.Y., we believe in going ahead and doing to yourself what God wants to do with you.

Our guest this morning on D.I.Y. is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

"Good morning, Mary, and welcome to D.I.Y."

"Thank you."

"Well, Mary, we appreciate your being on the program with us this morning.

People have been looking forward to your appearance with us. Please tell us what you think God is up to in this world. As you know, here at D.I.Y., we try to take some of the really big spiritual growth tasks and break them down to size, so that our lives can look like God wants them to look. What do you think we should be working on? What is God trying to do in this world?"

"God has taken the haughty and the proud and the puffed-up and the pompously self-made and has scattered them. God has taken the mighty and the powerful and those who use their influence to trample on others and has cast them down from their thrones and from their high places. God has taken those who are lowly and beneath and raised them up. God has taken those who have pushed to the margins and brought them to the very center of things. God has taken the hungry and the empty and has filled them up. God has taken the rich and the filled-up and has emptied them. This is what God wants the world to look like."

"Wow, Mary. That's a tall order. That's no small thing. Thank you for being with us on D.I.Y."

Well, ladies and gentlemen, let's do what we do. Let's break it on down. Let's figure out how to take this huge spiritual growth agenda and break it down to size, so that our lives can look like God wants them to look."

I want to tell you about Mrs. Coffee. I heard about her a few years ago. At that time, she was 97 years old, and she lived where she had always lived, next door in Alabama. And, Mrs. Coffee was a lifelong member of the Methodist Church. The church she attended received a new pastor, and together, the pastor and the church decided that they wanted to grow. It's never easy to grow, but they committed themselves to that difficult process. And, among the things they had to do differently was parking. You see, that church had some real parking challenges. So, the pastor asked all of the leaders of the church to park at least one block away from the building and walk to church so that the precious spaces close to the door could be reserved for guests and newcomers. Now, keep in mind, at the time I heard about this, Mrs. Coffee

was 97 years old and still driving herself to church. Well, the Sunday after her pastor made that request of the church's leaders, Mrs. Coffee did what she always did. She got up and got dressed and got in her car and headed to church. When she arrived in the church's neighborhood, she parked off the premises, got out of her car, and with a cane in one hand and a Bible in the other, she walked up the hill to the church.

When the pastor heard about it, he tried to tell Mrs. Coffee that at the age of 97, after all of her years of faithful service, she was entitled to park as close to the church as she wanted. She would have none of it. Guess what she said to her pastor? "I thought a visitor might need that parking space."

God's job, Mary said, is to take the proud and make them humble, to take the entitled and turn them into servants, to turn the takers into givers. It seems to me that Mrs. Coffee simply saved God the time and the trouble of having to mess with her. She went ahead and did it herself. D.I.Y. Listen to what the Bible says about what God wants to do with God's people, and save God the time and the trouble. D.I.Y.

I have some friends in Augusta. Three women, about my age, all sisters. And, each sister has some kids. One sister has a grown kid who's really been trouble for a long time. And, another sister has a kid who recently had a kid. With me so far?

So, let's call one mom Jane. Her daughter had a baby. And, that baby was born with a severe cleft palate. He has a very large hole in his lip. Two of these sisters, by the way, are nurses, and they tell me that a severe cleft palate before surgical repair can be a painful thing to see.

Let's call the other mom Sally. Her son is grown. He must be pushing 40 by now. I've known him since he was in middle school. He's a good-looking guy. Magazine kind of looks. And, since his parents did very well, he grew up as a child of privilege, with every possible toy and bell and whistle and advantage that any kid could ever want. For most of his adult life, this well-built, hunk of a guy has been in a halfway house or rehab facility or a jail cell. His life has become so woven around drugs that he can't or he won't walk or talk or live without them. And, when his habit grew beyond what his dropout-income could support, he started stealing. And, when he stole from his parents, they chose to prosecute him, because after all that time and all that love flushed down the drain, they decided that they could not any longer love him in any way that wasn't tough.

Well, one day, Jane's daughter was crying about her new baby with her mom and with her Aunt Sally, the mother of the son who had it all. And, her pain is pain with which we can empathize. Her baby doesn't look normal. He has a mile of operations ahead of him. Some physical pain, some emotional pain, some ridicule from children, who like grown-ups, can sometimes be cruel. Sally listened like a good Aunt does. And, when she got home, she found herself in tears. And, she called their other sister. And, with the compassion borne of love and with insight borne of suffering, here's what she said.

"I know the birth defect is a horrible thing. But, I really believe that I'd rather have a son with a whole in his lip than to have one with a whole in his soul."

God's job, Mary said, is to help us see the world from God's vantage point and not from the vantage point of the world's shallowness and superficiality. It is your soul that matters. Lips matter, too. God cares about physical pain. But, in this world that has fallen madly in love with image and with magazine covers and with airbrushes and with

physical perfection, it is soul and not image that matters. We are taking people and turning them into objects of beauty instead of seeing every person as beautiful in his or her own unique way. We often look at the outer shell instead at the inner person. And, Mary reminds us that God doesn't want it that way. God knows that a whole in your soul is a more debilitating defect than a whole in your lip. And, Sally went ahead and saw that herself. She saved God the time and the trouble of having to show her that. D.I.Y.

Whenever we hear or read any part of the Bible that has anything to say about what God is trying to do with you and with me and with this world, we can sit back and wait and think about how nice it is that God is up to such amazing stuff. Or, we can save God the time and the trouble of having to mess with us. We've heard today from Mary something of what God is trying to do. And, for of us who really want to grow up to be like Mary's son, that can mean only one thing. D.I.Y.