

And why has this happened to me?
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Isaiah 61:1-14
Luke 1:39-55

I can't remember his name, but I will never forget his story. It was several weeks ago, and I didn't expect to find anything worth watching on television when I stopped on a sports talk show. Now first you need to understand that sports talk shows are not something I regularly tend to watch, except maybe just before a Gator football game. But this time I stopped for reasons unknown, and heard the story of a young high school quarterback. He was the star of his team, the star of the school, heavily recruited. While considering different full scholarships to well-known universities, he went with his parents on vacation to the beach. He headed into the water as he had done so many times before, but this time when he dove in, he immediately knew something was very wrong.

He told the reporter that to this day he doesn't know what happened. The doctors told him that he most likely hit his head on a rock just under the water — but whatever it was, it caused a severe spinal cord injury that left him without the use of his legs and with only partial use of his arms. He gave the interview from a wheelchair, talking with the reporter about life since the accident, the daily regimen of physical therapy. He spoke with great thankfulness for one of the universities which had offered him his football scholarship even after they learned of the accident. His optimism was apparent throughout the interview, as well as conversations with those who knew him. His mother recounted that he told her, only hours after the accident, that he was going to beat the odds and walk again and that she shouldn't cry for him.

At one point the reporter asked him, "Haven't you ever stopped and asked, 'Why me?'" The answer came easily, "No, I never did." The reporter wasn't convinced, "Come on, you mean to tell me that you don't wonder why this happened to you?" And the answer came easily again, "No, I never asked God 'Why me' after the accident, because I never asked why I was so good at football before the accident."

Now I won't ask how many of you think that you would be able to say the same in his place, but I will say that I'm not sure I would be able to say that. It is much easier to accept that God may bless us with many gifts than it is to accept that God may also put challenges and trials in front of us. And it is much easier to ask, "Why me?" when we have been handed a defeat. But how often have we stopped to ask, "Why me?" when things have all gone our way?

That former football star gave us a difficult challenge: Can we accept whatever comes our way, even when we don't understand the reasons why? I immediately thought of Moses call at the burning bush, when he gives every reason he can think of why God ought to send someone else. "Why me?" he asked, "I'm no one special, send someone else." Moses tried to get out of doing what asked for so long that the Bible says that God's anger burned at Moses, and he finally accepted his call.

The story of Mary is another illustration of this example... You remember the scene, with the angel appearing to Mary and telling her that she will bear a son. Mary asks how this is possible, and the angel tells her nothing is impossible with God. Mary's response is wonderful, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

Now in 1999 it is hard to believe that Mary didn't think to herself, "Why me? Who is going to believe this? How will I explain this?" But all she said was "may it be to me as you have said." As I thought about those words, my mind travelled to another night, a very different night than our season of Advent — the opposite end of the church celebration. I thought of the night when Jesus was arrested, when he still had his freedom and he prayed in the garden, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

There are many ways we can face the challenges of this world: we can accept all that comes our way without question, we can ask God to just take it all away, we can be willing to do what we need to do out of service to God, and we can ask to be spared from that which seems to much to bear.

Right about now is when I should step in and tell you which of these is the best way to follow, but I'm not going to do that. Moses probably went too far in resisting God's will, but there are many different ways we can respond to what comes along in life. Sometimes we will know the reasons, sometimes we will understand later, but sometimes we will not know.

When we hear the words, "Why did this happen to me" we almost automatically think that something bad must have happened to someone. Perhaps this Christmas season we can take some time to remember the good things which have happened to us, and remember that all of these good things have come to us not because of our goodness, but through the grace of God that comes to each one of us through God's goodness to us. The more we look for the blessings that we have, the more we see the many blessings that we have. The more we enjoy the gifts God has given us, the more precious they become to us, and as we learn to see with those eyes, the more likely we are to exclaim with great gladness — "Why has this happened to me".

I suspect, no, I am sure that there will be days to come where you and I will wonder with sadness why some of the things of this life have happened to us. But in this time of waiting for the greatest gift of all, may we all take some time to remember that we are to receive the Lord Himself, come into our hearts and homes thanks only to the grace of God to we who are called His children.