Being a new dad is really good for your humility. Someone told me once that the goal parenting is to stay one day smarter than your kid. Well, my first three days of fatherhood provided me with three learning opportunities. The day after we brought Elyse home from the hospital, I remember watching her sleep and leaning over to Beth I said, “We have this whole parenting thing down! All she does is eat and sleep.” I was wrong. The day after that, I leaned over to Beth and said, “We’ve got this whole parenting thing down. We just needed to figure out her routine, and she’s easy.” I was wrong. It wasn’t until my third day of fatherhood that I realized the truth that every parent figures out: a baby changes everything.

Everything you think, everything you feel, everything you want and everything you love; a baby changes all of it. The French Philosopher Alain Baidou noticed this, but also noticed something else: that in roughly 100% of cases, the only people who notice that change are the parents, who hold in their arms the most beautiful, most precious, most perfect human being ever born. And it’s more than subjective. Hook a parent up to a polygraph, and they will swear up and down that their baby is the most beautiful, most precious, most perfect baby in a room full of babies. And they’ll mean it. It’s a phenomenon too pronounced to dismiss the way we talk about our hobbies or favorite foods; truth that needed its own category, subjectivity with an objective root, truth itself shaped by an event.

This is what makes the passage this morning so special. Mary recognizes that the best thing to ever happen to her had nothing to do with her. She heard the promise of God that promise compels her to act. Mary is a woman of firsts. She is the first missionary, the first ambassador of the Kingdom of God, the first to incarnate Christ to the world around her. And so she does what every missionary does: she goes.

She goes empty handed, no extraordinary evidence to support her extraordinary claim. She goes on the strength of a promise that God is going to use her to do something greater than she can ever ask or imagine. She goes, without knowing what comes next.

It’s the reason that more was written about Mary in the twentieth centuries than in the nineteen centuries that came before it combined. It’s the reason that at this time of year a billion Christians worldwide will Hail Mary, full of Grace. Not because they see her as diet-God, but because they see in her the potential of what we can be: Christ bearers to the world.

That’s what I love about this passage. Today, as the church stands just about on the threshold of Christmas, this passage showcases what that transition is supposed to look like. The move from Advent to Christmas is the move from promise to action. And Love is its doorway.

Love is the only one of Advent’s themes that’s not personal. Hope comes into the world that we can have hope. Hope for us. Peace comes into the world so we can be at peace. Peace is for us. Joy comes into the world so we can be filled with joy. Joy is for us. But love, is different than all the others that have come before it, because you can’t love on your own. Love calls us out of ourselves. It grabs us and shakes us and moves us into places we never thought we’d go.

It’s why we do stupid things when we fall in love. It’s why we make big romantic gestures and spend way too much money. It’s why we struggle to find words and why our insides flutter. Love is not a feeling, a thought, an attitude or an intention. Love is a call to action, because Love is intrinsically active. The challenge for the church in 2019 is incarnate Christ in a world so over-programmed, so over-scheduled, so over-acted that the world doesn’t reject it. The world simply has no space for it. To be kind, to act charitably, to do good to others in 2019 is a little bit like spitting in a rain storm.

That’s why I believe Christians of all stripes would do well to reconsider this morning’s passage. For those of us who’ve been shaped by the reformed traditions, we shy away from almost anything having to do with Mary for being a little too catholicky. Sure, Mary gets a nod on Christmas Eve and maybe around Easter, but that’s about it. We’re so afraid to venerate that we miss a chance to emulate, and that’s on us. Because I think Mary has something to teach us about what it means to welcome love into our lives.

Love is Connective/Relative?

Love is Reflective.

Love is Transformative/Restorative?.

Love is Restorative.

Work without love is slavery.

Art without love is kitsch.

Politics without love is violence.

Music without love is noise.

Government without love is tyranny.

Power without love is abuse.

Orthodoxy without love is heresy.

Sex without love is emptiness.

Marriage without love is monotony.

Business without love is greed.

Religion without love is fundamentalism.

Wealth without love is poverty.

Success without love is insignificance.

Life without love is death.