



About fifteen years ago, I was with this youth group at a men's shelter. The idea was not to simply show them the facility and all the services provided there, or even to help serve lunch. The most important part of the plan for making an actual impact on the teenage children of God, was asking them to have their meal not in the back by themselves, but with the residents. And so, a few of the high schoolers walked up to this younger gentleman sitting by himself. He had already finished eating but was drawing in a notebook. One of the more outgoing, not quite as nervous of the surroundings, youth managed to ask him what he was working on in front of him. It was none other than Mary.

Now, some of us privileged outsiders in the room had been to parts of the world displaying some of the most famous artwork of the mother of our Lord, from renowned Baroque and Renaissance and Impressionist painters. However, as the young man revealed his careful sketching, he also unveiled his personal story, including why Mary of all people in history, was emerging from his gifted handiwork. It was a story of heart-breaking times, hardly any of which was due to his own character or personal mistakes made, but simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Nevertheless, as he continued to share his journey, you could see the faces of his younger audience around the table, being reeled in with every spoken word and every stroke of the pencil. He did not ask for their pity or for them to feel sorry for him. He only had hope to give them. He only had belief to share with them. He only had a relentless courage to bestow on that generation wondering what they could do with their life in the years to come, some of them wondering if they had any gifts to share at all. It turned out that as much as they did their part in gifting their time by putting an entrée and some sides on a tray, that the biggest impact was not pulled off by them, but by a guy with a sketchpad.

And on that piece of paper, that holy conversation-starter among the faith and life-wanderers in that dining room, is a woman who has her own story to share. It is a story that we in the church must tread rather carefully in proclaiming. We want to lift her up to historic heights, bearing the Son of God and all. Except Mary doesn't seem too interested in being magnified on some holiness level. Instead, Mary prefers to stay on the ground with the rest of her family and friends. Not only that, but Mary wants to ensure the ones often overlooked, the ones forgotten, the ones who wonder if they have any gifts whatsoever to share with the world; Mary yearns for them to be cared for too with all this God coming to further life business. Mary seems to be much more captivated with God emerging in our human story level than her being transformed beyond us. Mary is much more fascinated by this God of the heavens coming to empower a young man at a homeless shelter, and a bunch of high schoolers along the way. And I have a feeling this humble teenage woman from Nazareth would be just as proud to be etched by a random guy at a lunch table as any of the worldwide famous painters. Because from that seemingly cheap scrap paper in front of a man with next to nothing came the most breathtaking work of art of all: the very Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That with that man in impoverished conditions, along with a young girl in similar circumstances thousands of years before, they both somehow still have more than enough to make an impact with God's holy material of grace. And that with those aforementioned teenage children of God, some of whom had been told they didn't do well enough in school or at home or

in the church: God insists on telling them they are more, more than enough in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

This is not just Mary's story. This is our story to fall in love with all over again this morning, tonight, and always. It is the story of the Gospel that at no point will you not have enough to still make an impact on this world that God loves. At no point, will you ever not be blessed by God with the very presence of Jesus Christ in your life. This is not just Mary's story we hear today and tonight and always. This is our story: that God says we matter. That God says we are loved. That God says we are worth coming down from the heavens for to bring the holy material of grace to life on paper pages, on sanctuary pews, around men's shelter tables, in art museum halls, on living room couches, and everywhere in between.

This is our life-long story to fall in love with over and over again: no matter when we feel as if we have next to nothing to offer; God will always say otherwise. We have more than enough holy material to work with in Jesus Christ. We have more than enough grace to share. It is the holiest material of the Gospel not reserved for a nativity scene or a sanctuary or a homeless shelter ministry site, but wherever we go, from the depths to the heights and everywhere in between. That there will never be a time or place in this life that we will ever be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!