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SERMON - God's Sunrise - Lauren Speeth

Delivered December 29, 2013 – Burlingame United Methodist Church

Zechariah – father of John the Baptist – is not a young man. He was rendered speechless for months after not believing the angel who told him he'd father a son in his old age. His son is born, and he breaks out with such a statement we call it Zechariah's Song: *By the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the paths of peace.*

Wow. That's some statement. Tender compassion. Shining light. Paths of peace. Zechariah is talking about the baby Jesus, whom his own son, John, will herald. Zechariah was an old man, and now he was a father of a little baby boy. A boy with a big job ahead, to herald the good news that the long awaited Messiah was coming. It was all so unexpected, like a dawn from on high, breaking in on Zechariah's life. Sometimes, the light breaks in, unexpectedly, like that. You thought you knew the end of some story line in your life, but then life surprises you.

Consider Marcus – Marcus was homeless, scrounging through garbage in Oakland, maybe thinking of better days – Could he have been more surprised when a reporter, with a story on *people behaving badly – illegal dumping of garbage in Oakland* – found him and took the time to get his story. Marcus had once been Marcus the Magnificent – played on Santana's first album – the band rehearsed in his own mother's garage. But he'd spent time in prison, and lost touch with the band. run into some trouble and fallen out of touch with Santana before the band had played at Woodstock, but now Santana has stepped in - like an unexpected dawn breaking in on the life of Marcus the Magnificent Malone. A roof over his head. A planned album.... Music again. Friendship. And all because of a story about garbage.

That's also what happened with Pope Francis – he was about to retire – he'd even submitted the paperwork, perhaps thinking his best days were behind him. But God had a different plan. God does that. Here's Zechariah. Surprise! And Mary - and let's not forget Joseph. It happens to all of us, in big and small ways. I know I've been mighty surprised at some of the unexpected turns my own life has taken. Sometimes I've welcomed it, but not always.

Sometimes, we're not ready for that dawn to break in. Morning light can be rude and harsh when we're comfy and snug in bed, sleeping. I'm sometimes a night owl, and I don't always welcome the sunshine in the morning. Comfortably set in my ways, I can sometimes feel like I don't want to grow, or to change, even if it's good for me.

In our Friday night services, we practice a radical hospitality, welcoming all comers to be fed – body and soul. Some who attend are homeless, some are not. Recently we added support from members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Some found this invitation uncomfortable, and some chose to leave.



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Sometimes, we're just not ready for the dawn to break in on our lives in radical ways like that. Easier just to roll over in bed.

Other times, it feels as if we'll wait forever for the dawn. But here's a radical thought: maybe the dawn is already here, but we don't recognize it. Jesus' ministry may have begun 30 years after Zechariah's song, but He was born in just a few short months – and He was with them on earth, before they knew Him.

There were signs, of course, and prophecies. If you were a Magi, you could read them. Or, if an angel personally stopped by with the news. But for many, this dawn that broke in on our earth unrecognized. You or I might not have noticed.

So here we are, a few days past Christmas. We may feel that holy presence, or we may not. We may be thinking about the New Year, and our own hopes for what the year will bring.

But just maybe, for a moment, we can ponder this little baby as the embodiment of hope... a radical dawn, breaking upon us from above, by God's tender mercy and compassion for us. And we can hold His promise in our hearts: that He will be with us always, even until the end of the age.



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