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“The Challenge”

A meditation by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year A)

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Matthew 1:18-24a

Have you heard about the Mannequin Challenge?

It's a new Internet video sensation where people remain frozen in action,
like storefront mannequins, while a videographer moves among them,
recording the 3D still-life scene while music plays.

Then it is broadcast over the Internet to see how many “likes” it scores.

*This Christmas Tableaux with these **children** would make a perfect
Mannequin Challenge, wouldn't it?

You children are so beautiful at this moment: clean, dressed in costume,
in church, and so well behaved.

Don't people always say they want to keep you this way: put a brick on your
head so you won't grow?

*And isn't Advent delightful at just this moment? Doesn't **the church** look
beautiful with the poinsettias on the chancel, the garlands on the
balcony, and the Christmas tree with chrismons handmade
by the Presbyterian Women out in the foyer?

And the music: we get to hear and sing all of our favorites at this time of year.

It doesn't get much better than this, does it?

I wish we could just **freeze time** at this point in time and stop the earth from spinning around the sun just for a moment.

*And **Jesus**, why he's just a baby about to be born.

He will be an innocent, like our children; he will be meek and mild;
he will grow in wisdom, stature, and knowledge of God.

He will not have facial hair yet, or pick fights with the Pharisees and Sadducees,
or delve in sickness and poverty, or incite a great social movement.

He's just a baby about to be born.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could keep him that way and not let him grow
up to be so complicated, so challenging, and so demanding of our time?

Let's try it, children. **Let's see if we can take the Mannequin Challenge**
and freeze, just like you are, for a minute or two.

I'll count to three, and everyone freeze and hold your pose. Ready... 1, 2, 3... Freeze!
Oops, I think I see a donkey moving his hooves. Oops, I think an angel just sneezed.
Oops, I think Mary shrugged her shoulders.
... Oops, I think the clock is still ticking.

Okay, relax, children. We just can't do it, can we?

We're just not up to the Mannequin Challenge. Not now. Not ever!
We Presbyterians don't like to be called the frozen chosen, do we?
We want to be on the move.

*And you **children** do not stay children forever. Even while we are standing here,
you are growing up on a molecular level.

*And in **the church**, Advent fades to Christmas, and Christmas fades to Epiphany,
and Epiphany leads to flowing waters,
where Jesus, quickly an adult, shows up at the muddy river's edge
to be baptized into the ministry of God and Spirit.

And we Presbyterians are baptized into that messy, muddy ministry, too,

as part of The Reformed Tradition:
a tradition that is changed and always being changed
because change and motion are the nature of reform.

***Jesus Christ is our living Lord.** The one in whom we live **and move** and have
our being, not the one in whom we are frozen in our rites and rituals.
From the moment he will be born, he will call us out to congregate and agitate
for justice and righteousness, to blink our eyes in constant prayer,
and to move our hands and feet to work for the disfavored people
whom he favors the most.

Faith is not static; it is dynamic, and even at this holy moment,
it is beckoning us to move on past this manger
and meet God-With-Us/Light-With-Us in the busyness and darkness
of the world out there.

Friends, hear the good news. We are all losers!
We will lose this Mannequin Challenge!

We cannot remain still, still, still and unchanged, even for a moment,
but we will win a place in the heart of God as we live and move
and follow our living Lord, Jesus Christ. Please pray with me...

**Come God. Come with the frightened. Come with the poor. Come with the
children. Come with those who have always been your friends. Come and
lead us to where you are living, and show us what you want us to do. Amen.**