

Think about a journey you once took. You may not remember it. It was a long time ago, and you have never been back to that place.

You almost certainly made this journey; nearly everyone has. It was a voyage by water, a marine expedition. Actually, submarine.

When you were smaller than a poppy seed, you sallied forth. You embarked on a roiling, cascading, four-day journey down a fallopian tube.

I know this is strange to think about. It’s strange to talk about. It pushes the envelope on our ability to see and embrace the truth. But this really was you.

No one asked if you were ready. You received no instructions. No one said, “Do you want to be born? It’s entirely up to you, you know.” No one showed you how. But you put to sea. For the first days of your life, you floated free.

Imagine you had been conscious. They say consciousness flickers in at 24 weeks. But imagine you’d been fully conscious from the beginning. An embryo—a tiny cluster of cells—you spin, you twirl, you tumble at the mercy of forces beyond you.

Had you been conscious, you’d have come to one of two conclusions: Either a merciless current is sweeping me away, or a guiding current is carrying me to where I need to be. In other words, you would have had to make a choice: panic or trust.

But for now, as a tiny embryo, it’s not your choice to make. You can only float – let the current carry you. It’s as if the dial has been preset for trust, as if reliance on a power greater than yourself has been prearranged. At the beginning, you did not have the ability to say “no” to your own life. God said “yes,” and that was that. God wanted you. So God did not put that choice in your hands, not just yet.

In fact, God *commanded* you to be. In the exact cadence of His words at the beginning of creation itself, God said: “Let there be Abigail. Let there be Ramon. Let there be Maya.” And it was so. You came to be, and God saw that you were very good.

Comes a time, though, when you do—when you must—choose. “I have set before you life and death,” says God. “Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live ...” Then God tells you how to make that choice. God says, “But if your heart turns away ... to worship other gods ... you shall surely perish.”

In other words, the way to choose life is to never choose death. Never turn away from God. The dial is preset for life, for trust; keep it there. It’s as your life has been designed for trust. True, it’s a perilous journey—think of *tubing* on a raging river—but keep trusting. Don’t panic. Just as He did on the *embryonic* leg of your journey, the Lord is guiding you still. Just as He did when you cascaded down the fallopian tube, the Lord carries you still. You were created to listen to the words of the Lord. Listen to the One who knows you, who knows your entire journey.

But this is how we choose death: We start taking our cues from the impressive powers of a sophisticated world, also known as “other gods.” “Surely you are no longer a child,” beckons the worldly voice. “Surely you have arrived at maturity; you have accepted that there never was a God. Take matters into your own hands. You must, of course. You have no choice.”

And we said, “Of course, you’re right. The matter is delicate. We’d like to trust God, but with this? We’d best see to it ourselves.” In so doing, we said “no” to trust, “no” to God, and therefore “no” to our own life. We broke away from the guiding current of God’s Word. We chose death.

Picture Mary, a tall 26-year-old from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Already in the sixth grade, Mary wanted to be a nurse like her mother. She watched strangers greet her mother with tearful gratitude; she watched her mother love them generously. Mary could see that her mother was someone who made a difference. And that’s what Mary wanted.

After high school, Mary went to Villanova. She not only excelled in her classes, she led a campus organization called Nurses Without Borders. Mary came to see nursing as more than the practice of medicine; nursing, she saw, needs to wade into the inescapable issues of social justice. In her senior year, Mary began to think God might be calling her—if there *was* a God; sometimes she wondered—she thought God wanted her to make a difference on a larger scale.

So, Mary went to the University of Pennsylvania where she earned a PhD in Community Health. Along the way, however, two things happened. First, she realized healthcare is a *global* issue. She applied and was accepted to the London School of Economics.

The second thing was Michael. She met her soulmate. Michael received his MBA from Penn and was able to secure a position with a large firm in London. They found a flat, and Mary flew over to start classes while Michael wrapped up things at home.

The day before Mary’s classes began, Michael called. He wasn’t moving to London. He’d been offered a job in New York, a position too good to pass up. The phone call got ugly. And Michael broke up with the woman he loved.

Mary was furious and sick to her stomach. Sick to her stomach? Mary wondered: “Am I feeling queasy because my life is falling apart? Or am I queasy because ...” She got a pregnancy test. It was positive.

She panicked. “My life is going down the *tube!*” she cried. “What’s happening to me?” For half a second, she entertained the notion of having the baby. “Wait. Am I out of my mind? Michael’s baby? That jerk! And besides, I can’t make a global difference and raise a child, too. But wait. Couldn’t God have prevented the pregnancy?” She’d figure it out later. But she’d get the abortion as soon as possible.

The next morning on the subway—excuse me, in London they call it “the Tube”—the next morning on the Tube, Mary panicked again. “I’m on the wrong train!” Just then a Metronet worker strolled down the aisle. “Is this train that carries me to the London School of Economics?” Mary asked.

“You’re just where you need to be,” said the worker. When Mary saw the worker’s name on her badge—Cecelia—her thoughts jumped to the word “cilia.” Cilia are the hair-like structures which line a fallopian tube. They wave back and forth creating a current that guides the embryo to the uterus, where it needs to be. At Villanova, Mary’s favorite professor once compared cilia to cheerleaders for the embryo. “Go, little person, keep going.”

*There ought to be cilia somewhere to guide adults,* Mary thought. Just then a young woman slid onto the seat beside Mary. “Hi, I’m Liz,” she said. It turned out Liz was also enrolled at the London School of Economics. Liz was easy to talk to.

As they walked from the Tube to the school, Mary and Liz passed a towering church. Mary thought she might go in sometime to pray. But she must have gazed at the cathedral a moment too long. “Do you go to church?” Liz asked.

“Almost never,” said Mary.

“I’m a Christian,” Liz replied. Before they parted, they agreed to meet for lunch.

*I wonder if Liz was named after Queen Elizabeth, thought Mary as she walked to class. Then it struck her: Elizabeth. In the Bible, that's who Mary told about her pregnancy. Oh, God, no, Mary thought. No! I am not telling anyone. How can I even think of having a baby? No friends, no family. And my life, my career, my calling. It's impossible. I have no choice. I have to take matters into my own hands.*

But we do have a choice. "Therefore choose life," God said, "that you and your offspring may live." The way to choose life is to trust. Don't panic. Did you think human life was going to be humanly possible? It's not. It was never meant to be. Guiding a human being through the journey of life is possible only for God. That's why the only way to choose life is to trust, to trust God. God gives no one a possible life. The call of God is to an impossible life. Otherwise, why trust? And life was created for trust.

At lunch, did Mary pour out her soul to Liz? And did Liz take her hand and say: "I'm here for you. We'll get through this together." And did Mary have her baby? And did Michael come to his bloody senses, quit his job, fly to London, beg forgiveness from the woman he loved, open his hand to reveal a beautiful ring, and ask her to marry him? And is Mary trusting God for the wellbeing of her child, for her own education, for her calling, and for her entire impossible life?

And was it through this very experience that Mary finally discerned God's call? Is that how she devoted her life to formulating and advocating for pro-human, pro-life public health policies grounded in economic realism, global responsibility, and community resourcing?

If so, this could only have happened through the "cilia" by which God guides us: the people who love us and cheer us on, the Word of God in Church and Bible, and the sacraments

of Baptism and Holy Communion. Through these, God nudges, guides, and carries us, and ever unfolds the astonishing journey He has created for our one and only lifetime.

Or did Mary abort her baby? Did she believe the lie that even God couldn't find a way to carry both her *and* her baby on the journey? Did Mary trade trust for panic? Did she take matters into her own hands?

And was it after the abortion that she began to slip into that church every afternoon to pray: “Oh, Christ, love me again. As you have always carried my life, carry also my sin; carry it to the cross and suffer it away.” And kneeling in that cathedral, does Mary now look up at the statue, at those nail-pierced hands, and plead that somehow Christ still holds her baby in *His* hand?

And was it through this very experience that Mary finally discerned God's call? Is that how she devoted her life to formulating and advocating for pro-human, pro-life public health policies grounded in economic realism, global responsibility, and community resourcing?

If so, this could only have happened because even though *every* human being has turned away from Him in panic and rebellion, God found a way—the cross—to carry us still in the strong current of His abiding Word, His pure and amazing grace.

These two choices are vastly different: to give birth to a child or to abort it. But one thing is the same: to choose Jesus is to choose life. For Jesus holds every life—even the tiniest—in the nail-scarred palm of His hand.