

The Power of Love

Luke 1:39-55

The power of love is real, and at times, miraculous. To know that we are loved and that we are supported can make all the difference in the world. I am so grateful that we got to be a part of an act of love today as we shared in the confirmation of Linda, welcoming her into this space and promising one another that we will support each other in our faith, be there for one another to help grow and be transformed by the love of God.

The story we hear today is a story of two unlikely women who have been chosen by God, and they would play a part in transforming this world. These women were not wealthy; they were not powerful, and they were not revered in society. In fact, they were both marginalized. One was very young, poor, and not married. And the other was well past child-bearing years. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins.

A few weeks ago, we heard the story of Zachariah who was a priest and who, when told by the angel that his wife Elizabeth was pregnant, he scoffed and didn't believe it was possible, which led to God silencing Zachariah until the child was born.

But this is not the story of Zachariah, nor is it the story of Joseph. This is the story of two women coming together in mutual support, both carrying children who would bring God's message to the world. Through John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah. The story of Mary and Elizabeth coming together in celebration of their pregnancies, and the fact that they will give birth to John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah foreshadows the Hebrew scriptures' prophecies that a new king will come to God's chosen people, but *this* king will be the Prince of Peace. This king, unlike many others that we hear about in the Bible, will act justly, will love with great kindness, and will walk humbly with God, as it is foretold by the prophet Micah. And what we come to understand in this story of Mary and Elizabeth is that God indeed is good. God keeps promises, and expectations will be realized and lived out in this world.

Now before Mary went to visit with Elizabeth, an angel appeared to Mary, gave her good news that she had found favour with God, and thus would conceive a son and she would name him Jesus. Now, I don't know about you, but if I were Mary, I would wonder, "Hm, how could this be?" Why was *she* chosen for this great task to give birth to the Son of God? Then the angel let

Mary know that her relative Elizabeth – who was of an older age, or wisdomed age – that she would also be conceiving a son because nothing is impossible with God.

This is where the scriptures picked up today. After the angel had told Mary about these things, she went with haste to see Elizabeth. But the question is why? Why did Mary, who was expecting, decide to go and visit her relative Elizabeth? Now there's a lot of scholarly debate about the theological meaning of her action. Did Mary need confirmation of what had been told her, or did she need encouragement to continue believing in what God had done? Or did Mary go to Elizabeth to offer confirmation and encouragement, rather than being the one to receive it? Both women had received confirmation that when their babies actually left in their womb in each others' presence. What a wonderful experience.

It's clear from Mary's reaction with Elizabeth at the moment that this was not something she was expecting. In fact, she went so far as to question, "why would Mary, the mother of her Lord, come to be with her?" Both women know instinctively at that moment that they truly had been blessed. Again, this exchange between Mary and Elizabeth affirms the fact that we are all the chosen people of God. Regardless of status, regardless of our mistakes, and especially when society believes that we are not worthy. When we ourselves believe and feel that we are not worthy. This is the precise moment when God calls. God believes in us, and God is with us. So *Mary's Song*, the Magnificat, echoes a hymn of praise. It is a song of great thanksgiving. It's a chant that expresses the belief that God's promise is being fulfilled.

So on this fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear words of love expressed. Love for a vulnerable child. Love for family. And love for God. We too come with haste today, to witness and to receive the good news that with God, nothing is impossible. We, like Mary, are called to celebrate. Mary went with haste to share the good news that she had received with Elizabeth, and they cared for one another and supported one another and waited for these gifts that they had received to be born and introduced to the entire world. And they were not afraid, for God was with them.

If you think about it, God provided Mary with Elizabeth and Elizabeth with Mary. God gave them something that they both lacked: deep connection and community. The story reminds us that our lives are intertwined. So what have *you* received from God this week, this month, and this year? Where is the Holy Spirit at work in your life and in the world? And what blessings have you received? How will you sing praises to God on this day like Mary did? For even in this great darkness and in this time of uncertainty, this story provides us with faith. Faith that Mary had, that indeed what God had offered her was truly a gift.

I think many of us struggle when God looks on us with favour; it gives us such opportunities to be part of transforming this world. And I hope that this story inspires each and every one of us

to believe and to be humble in our response. We didn't hear Mary trying to give this gift back to God. She didn't beat herself up with negative self-talk or discouraging words, saying, "I cannot be the right person to do this." She simply stayed in the moment. She was present to the words that she heard from the angel; present to her cousin; present to the baby that was growing within her. She opened herself up to what was about to happen, and most importantly, she trusted in God. This faith fuelled her soul, and caused her to sing out, "My soul magnifies the Lord."

Her soul rejoiced, and I believe that is why she went with to Elizabeth. When something amazing happens to you, you want to share it with somebody. Think about a time when somebody told you a secret, about something wonderful that was going to change their life. Do you remember the look of excitement and fear in their eyes? Mary's soul was magnified. It increased in measure. It was filled and overflowed with joy and hope. I wonder how this story will inspire a community of faith that we are in. To not only seek out love and support, but also to bring love and support to the community that we serve. For the power of God reaches beyond all divides. And I hope and pray that each one of you will be a beacon of love and light in this world, as we continue the journey towards Bethlehem, to see and to witness the birth of Jesus and share this good news with others. The Prince of Peace is coming. Amen.