

Luke 1:39-56 Pastor Bill Uetricht 4 Advent 12/20/09

“I’ll Go Tell Elizabeth” was sung.

Honestly, in the Bible women’s stories are often not at the front and center. As has been true throughout much of history, “her” story in the Bible is often not told. “Her” story is often marginalized, placed on the edges or the margins. Such is not true for the Gospel writer Luke. In Matthew the initial focus of the birth story is Joseph. In Luke it is Mary. And in the case of today’s text the focus is Mary and her relative Elizabeth. Their stories are not marginalized. They are at the center today.

Luke tells us that Mary went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country. We are not told why she left Nazareth in such a hurry. Some suggest that her pregnancy is quite a scandal and could result in serious repercussions for her. Maybe she is scared of the shame that will be placed on her. Maybe she’s frightened because she has never been pregnant before, never had a child before. Or maybe she flees in such a hurry because of an overwhelming need to be with a friend, a mentor, someone who will understand. Elizabeth will understand. She is a woman. She, too, is pregnant. Joseph has his own issues. He’s probably too often in his head. “I’ll go tell Elizabeth. She’ll understand. She’ll hold my hand.”

Luke tells us that when Mary came into Elizabeth’s presence, the baby that was in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. Even when only in his mother’s womb John the Baptist recognized the greater one. Later John will preach that a more significant one is coming after him. Fancifully, Luke tells us that John knew that even when he was in his mom’s belly. Even in utero he recognized that he was in the presence of the holy. Elizabeth, too, recognized that she was in the presence of

something very big, something holy. Filled with the Holy Spirit she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Mary, blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of the womb.” Something big is here, Mary. In your coming the holy has entered my house. **Elizabeth** speaks these words. Zechariah, her husband is quiet. He is without voice. The **women** have a voice today.

William Loader puts it this way in relationship to this story: “Spirituality is not men’s business alone. Holiness is the companion of life, of intimacy, of pregnancy, of childbirth, of family. Holiness is at home with the unromantic and painful aspects of all of these. Holiness invites both men and women into sensing [God’s] presence in the first stirrings, the fetal gymnastics, the soiled diapers, the tired nights, the teething cries, the not knowing what to do. Human business is holy business, frequently messy business.”

Often our lives are quite messy. Often they are quite ordinary. Sometimes because women give birth (to six children in our congregation over the last seven weeks, by the way) and because they have often assumed more of the responsibility of tending and caring for children they can be better acquainted with its ordinariness and its messiness. Yes, I changed many diapers, woke up in the middle of the night often to tend to crying or sick children. But in our case my wife dealt more with the day-to-day ordinariness and messiness of child rearing. And many times she would go tell Elizabeth, for Elizabeth would understand.

Many times throughout history the stories of women have been placed on the edges, the margins, because women were thought to deal with the mundane, the ordinary, while men were thought to be shaping the world. If the story of Elizabeth and Mary and ultimately the

story of the baby born at Christmas means anything, it means that the mundane, the ordinary is indeed the place for the presence of the holy, the divine, God.

Where is God to be found? God is to be found in the passionate friendship that two women share, two women who knew that truly the other will understand. God is to be found in the messiness and wonder of sexuality, the scariness and joy of pregnancy. God is to be found in kicking and burping babies. God is to be found in the excitement **and** the fear of the younger and the wisdom and measuredness of the older. God is to be found in the presence of the mentor. God is to be found in the struggling faith of the young and the old: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

God is to be found in the song. When Mary was told by Elizabeth of her blessedness, her uniqueness, her specialness, she broke out in song. Today’s text, in many ways, is a musical. Fewer words and more music—that is the spirit of today. The Christmas story is best sung. God is to be discovered in the song—the song of praise, the song of complaint, the song of joy, the song of sadness. The deepest truths about life are often discovered not in constant babbling, but in the poetic, the lyrical, the musical.

Yet Mary’s song surprises us about where the presence of God is to be discovered. Her song is no sweet melody. Her song is so radical that the nation of Guatemala in the 1970’s may it illegal to sing. Her song is about a God who turns the world upside down, the God who lifts the humble, fills the hungry with good things, and leaves the wealthy no part. God has chosen her, a young no-named woman, to be the mother of the Lord. It’s a new day. It’s a new world. God is to be

discovered in the ordinary world as it is being turned upside down, as those who are left out, those who are on the bottom, those who ordinary are lifted up, highlighted, thought to be extraordinary.

This really, by the way, is the song that is sung throughout the whole Jesus story. Ordinary no-named Mary will give birth to a baby in a place where cattle feed in a town that was considered one of the most insignificant of its day. This baby will be visited first by ordinary, dirty shepherds. And eventually this baby will grow up and will be guided by ordinary yet faithful parents. This man will love and will forgive ordinary broken, hurting, and left out people. The authorities will be threatened by this new turned-upside down world, and they, therefore, will put Jesus, the lover, to death. But the God who turns everything upside down will not let them have the last word. Death will give way to life, resurrected life. And therefore Mary's song will be sung forever: "Great and mighty are you, O Holy One, strong is your kindness evermore. How you favor the weak and lowly one, humbling the proud of heart."

Let's go tell Elizabeth that. Let's go tell Laura. Let's go tell Tara, Jean, Paul, Rhonda, Aileen, Steve, Jacob, Sandy, the high and mighty, the lowly and the forgotten, men and women alike. Let's go tell the world.