

December 18 – Fourth Sunday in Advent

“Waiting on God”

Gratitude

Luke 1:46b-55

No matter how many times I read the account of the angel visitation to Mary I am stunned by her response. Here we find a young woman, betrothed but not married, being told that she is pregnant and that her child is the long awaited messiah. There were the cultural issues of the day where being with child could: end her engagement, possibly cause her to be expelled from her home or synagogue, and in a worst case scenario be stoned to death. Beyond these possibilities, all of which are horrific to contemplate, she is also given the task of raising the messiah. What would that mean? What would this special child be like, how would he act and grow? Who knew? We have all of this stuff churning around inside of Mary and yet her response is gratitude. I love how the message translation begins these verses that have come to be known as the magnificat.

Message version

I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,

What is it in waiting that can lead to gratitude? It is clear from listening to Mary's experience that it isn't found outside of us. All of the “externals” of her environment were scary. It is like I said in my community thanksgiving service. We cannot expect others to provide the environment for gratitude. If we need others to make us happy we will find that most of the time we will live a very sad and gloomy existence. Gratitude comes from within. It comes from an outlook that sees what God is doing. For Mary, “God took one good look at me, and look what happened— I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!” Seeing her life in connection with God filled her with joy and gratitude. All of those other things, at least for the moment, didn't matter. All that mattered was that she was beloved of God. Understanding that her life would be used by God for some great purpose filled her with gratitude and joy.

This is what we need to understand today. As we are still in that waiting time of Advent, though Christmas will be here very soon, our gratitude will come when we combine all those other aspects of waiting that we have been talking about this Advent season. Remember how we talked about the need for trust even when we are anxious and impatient, and how we need to accept the comfort that comes to us while all the time depending upon God who never fails? When we can do this gratitude to God follows.

It also helps us to live into God's vision of our future instead of our own. Think again about the scripture that I read today. Mary's response to the angel was to give thanks for all that God was doing and would do. For a few moments she could set aside what this might mean for her. Instead she just embraced what God was doing and decided that she would live into God's future instead of her own.

We need to live with expectant hope, praise and thanks for what God is doing. We can't be upset if it isn't our vision. The people of Israel had been waiting a long time for the messiah. Finally the word came that Jesus would be born. I am sure the people of Israel, even Mary, expected something different than what they got. No one predicted a baby born to a woman betrothed to a carpenter would be their savior. Yet when Mary heard this is was how God was going to be at work, when she realized the waiting was over, she gave thanks.

In closing let me share a story of gratitude from today. There is a story going around the internet about a young man named Joe. He had been out of work for some time. He was feeling really glum as he drove wondering how he was going to meet all of his financial commitments. He was traveling home when he noticed a disabled car alongside the road. It was winter and cold and icy. He stopped to see if he could help. The older woman looking a little terrified of Joe rolled down her window and said she had a flat tire. Joe told her to stay in the car while he changed the tire. He got the jack out of the trunk, got down in the icy mud to place it under the car and finally wrested the flat tire off and put on the spare. After he had put the tire in the car he came back to the woman to tell her that she could go. She wanted to pay Joe. He told her that he had been taught that you don't get paid for doing a good turn for another. Instead, he

challenged, do something nice for another. With gratitude she drove off. Joe went on his way feeling in a much better spirit as well. Even though his problems were the same he felt better because he had done something for another.

The woman goes on her way and soon comes to a café. The waitress who waited upon her was very pregnant. The woman could tell her feet and back hurt but she was pleasant to the woman and always had a smile for her. When she brought her bill the woman waited until the waitress's back was turned. She placed a \$100 bill on the table and snuck out. That night the waitress came home and as she snuggled into bed beside her husband she said, "It's going to be o.k. We are going to be able to pay our bills Joe."

Let us live with expectant hope and be filled with gratitude for what God is doing in our lives.