

Mary and Elizabeth – Models for Ministry

Luke 1:39–56

The angel Gabriel has just delivered his astonishing news to Mary that she is going to have a son and his name will be Jesus. And Mary has just delivered her world-changing response, “Let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). And now, immediately and “with haste,” Mary makes her way to Elizabeth’s house in the hills of Judea for a three-month stay.

If we are looking for models of ministry in our modern times, Mary and Elizabeth should come to mind. On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, with Christmas only two days following, we are waiting for a birth that will turn the world upside down. Anticipating what is to come, we are called to live as if it is already here. Expecting this magnificent event, we are shown how to embody here and now what the birth of Christ will usher into the world. More than just characters in the story leading up to Christmas, Mary and Elizabeth show us how to live when we realize God has blessed us, that our world is going to be turned upside down, and when we sing thanks to God.

Mary has received life-changing news from an angel she flees. Some say she wants to get out of the spotlight and potential danger. Others say she is afraid, and she would be normal to have some fear and anxiety about what to do. But I believe she does not run away; she runs toward. She goes to Elizabeth, the one who is full of faith and wisdom. The first words on Elizabeth’s mouth are words of blessing, “Blessed are you among women and the babe in your womb is also blessed.” Are you looking for a blessing right now? Think about how these words of blessing were important to Mary and how they might be important for us too.

When someone is about to have their first baby, they are likely to hear the phrase “your whole life is going to change.” What does that mean? The answers are many and varied. What did it mean for Mary? It meant she went to her wise friend and relative and was told; “Blessed are those who believe what God has said and believe every word will come true.”

Mary and Elizabeth teach us we can’t put off the implications of Christmas. We can’t defer its significance. We can’t postpone how it will affect our lives. We simply have to live as if it is true now. This is what we witness in Mary and Elizabeth. They realize the blessings that are about to arrive alter everything about now. They believe that when God fulfills God’s promises, no matter when that fulfillment happens, that truth makes a difference now.

Mary and Elizabeth, in whom God has found favor, return that favor. Even though they do not yet grasp the fullness of that favor, even though they do not yet realize the magnitude of God’s regard for them, they know enough to act on it, and they can hardly wait to do so. In short, this beautiful, ancient story insists that God’s love is a force that will change the world.

When new opportunities and challenges arise, we are wise to follow Mary’s example and intentionally seek out allies, forming sanctuaries of love and mutual support. Following in Mary’s footsteps, we can draw inspiration and lift our voices and sing: *God’s love is remaking the world!*

Advent helps us recognize that our response to Christmas cannot wait. Advent reminds us that when Christmas is “over,” our work is just getting started and should have already started.

As a result, Advent reminds us of a critical component of faith; that faith is as much response as it is anticipation. That faith is not just looking forward to fruition and fulfillment, but finds ways to manifest God’s promises in the present. That faith trusts in God’s future while at the same time insists on making God’s future present for all people.

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob