

Luke 1:39–55

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Two women meet in an out-of-the-way village on the backward fringe of the civilized world. Both are pregnant. They are probably cousins, but still separated by as much as a generation. One of the women is much older and is finally pregnant, much to the relief of her hopes and the redemption of her honor in that culture and age. The other cousin is much younger, perhaps no more than 15, and is strangely – almost scandalously – pregnant. The older cousin is properly married, and has been with her husband for many years; but the younger is only engaged and should be a virgin, but is now with child. The fate of this younger cousin is quite a cause for concern and worry in that culture and age.

Two women meet. “Finally pregnant” is greeted by “O My God! Pregnant?!” Publicly pregnant Elizabeth and privately pregnant Mary meet; and by all accounts, “A lot to be happy about” should be overwhelmed by “A lot to be worried about.” For such is the truly worrisome and precarious world shaped by the interference of...men. Men...are not included in this meeting. Now perhaps the men have dismissed the

meeting of these two women as either unimportant or a “chick” thing; or perhaps they have purposely kept their distance because at this kind of meeting they warily sense they are out of their league. For there is a strange power at work in this meeting of the pregnant, and it unnerves most men even as they deny it, shrug it off, or make light of it. Or perhaps, by the hand of an unseen director, men are quite simply excluded from the meeting because they are an interference not now to be tolerated.

Elizabeth is greeted by Mary; and “a lot to be happy about” should be starkly confronted with “a lot to be worried about.” But instead, for some reason, and quite literally – Elizabeth feels and gets a kick out of Mary’s greeting! In fact, Elizabeth gets quite a kick out of Mary’s greeting. And by God, the whole world will get quite a kick out of Mary’s greeting – a kick that will eventually send it reeling.

Some Thursday mornings while serving Epiphany Church, I would move about rather quietly; and really try to make myself fairly scarce or scarcely noticed. “Why?” The Moms’ Bible Study was meeting in the Chapel. And fellas, it was a power meeting, let me tell you. A few times I worked up my courage to stick my head in and greet these mothers. At the sight of me, all conversation would stop, as if interrupted by “one of them” or squelched lest this intruder know what or whom they were discussing. After exchanging brief pleasantries, I wasted little time in leaving the room, they could tell you. But as I rounded the corner to retreat to the safe haven of my office, I sometimes overheard someone make a comment that I couldn’t make out, but to which a peel of laughter was the response that I could make out. It was kind of unnerving, let me tell you, fellas. I knew I was out of my league.

Now as I understand it, occasionally the women in the Mom’s Bible Study group actually discussed the Bible; but at other times, and I fear many other times, the “spirit” of their meeting led them into discussing other topics. And you can just imagine what or *who* they might have been. And what’s unnerving is that they could discuss those topics – or husbands – or male clergy - so knowingly and irrefutably. When those mothers were together, we men were just at the mercy of their...truth. We could try to deny it, shrug it off, or make light of it (as I have probably just been doing); but when women meet, there is at work a different power for life, one that we men don’t know how to handle, but it sure handles us; and we are out of our league. I think the Moms’ Bible Study group got a kick out of the effect they had on me. And now I think you do, too.

That’s what I think happened when Mary and Elizabeth met together. The whole world was suddenly out of its league; for a different power for life was at work in their

meeting, and we all find ourselves simply at the mercy of their truth. “A lot to be happy about” Elizabeth should find Mary to be the incarnation of “a lot to be worried about.” But no... Instead, Elizabeth gets a great, joyful, and literal kick out of Mary’s pregnancy. The baby in her womb kicks. And the strangely knowing and Holy Spirit of their meeting is such that Elizabeth knows it is a leap for joy. Already John the Baptist, even while still in the womb, recognizes the presence of the Savior Christ just barely conceived. Luke wants us to know that we are all out of our league now... This is God at the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth.

So even with all the very real worries, fears, and dangers before them, suddenly these women are joyful and share between them the laughter of faith. Wouldn’t you and I like to have that happen to us? ...Even with all the worries, fears, if not dangers before us, still to know the joy and to share the laughter of such faith. But like this pastor before that Moms’ Bible Study group, maybe we are for the moment still out of our league...at the power meeting of Mary and Elizabeth. For that different power is at work, stirring within the very bodies of these women; and we are all like men who just do not know how to handle it. But it’s going to handle us... It’s the power of a new life that’s relentlessly on the way – a new life that will somehow disarm all the macho violence of our meanness and shame all our mindless violation of the meek, a new life that will challenge all the lies that we’ve concocted to deceive ourselves and the myths that like a drug still enthrall us, a new life that will come forth despite all the swaggering powers that take and kill and destroy. That different power is at work between Mary and Elizabeth, and is stirring within their very bodies; and we do not know how to handle it. But it’s going to handle us. We are at the mercy of the knowing truth...of God...with us.

And Elizabeth gets quite a kick out of it. Even in Elizabeth’s womb, John the Baptist is already leaping to prepare the way...for the Lord Jesus Christ, who in Mary’s womb is on the way as God with us. Elizabeth gets quite a kick out of it all. How about you and me? Do we get that kick out of it yet? Or maybe we just don’t get it yet.

This is all so much more than the story of Mother Mary and Mother Elizabeth. There is a reason why we are called “Mother Church.” By the mystery of God’s purpose through our Baptism into Christ, we have been chosen to bear Christ to the world. That’s our gospel mission and the point to all our ministries together: to bear Christ to this world...as Mary bore Christ into this world. We are pregnant with the Good News of Him who is new life. Some of us are showing, and maybe some of us are not showing quite yet... But by the Holy Spirit, hidden and sudden, we are all pregnant with that new life called “Jesus.” Are you getting that kick out of it yet?

Every time we meet together, that unique power is at work between us – that different power that makes the world know it is out of its league; that wondrous power that the world does not know how to handle...because it's God's power to handle the world; that strange power of new life on the way and coming despite everything that is awkwardly done to deny it, shrug it off, or stop it.

We are Mother Church, so frustrating to the world, so unnerving to the world, and so pregnant with Him who is new life coming into the world. We are Mother Church; and by God, Christ Jesus is on the way! Among us there is to be had a joy that no worry or fear can smother. And between us there is a laughter of faith in the Lord, and the whole world is at the mercy of its revealing truth. This, right here and right now – this is the power meeting that Elizabeth and Mary shared.

I pray you will be joining friends and loved ones this holiday season. I pray you will be joining others in tasting the zesty happiness of these festive days. I pray you will be joining us on Christmas Eve. But most of all, I pray you will be joining Mary and Elizabeth in getting that joyful kick out of bearing Jesus Christ who is coming to this restless world of all our hopes and fears.

Merry Christmas!