

December 23-24, 2006

Luke 1:39-55

“Love Turns the World Upside Down

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It’s almost Christmas, but not quite.

Elizabeth and Mary, two women get together to talk, to share ideas, to wonder about what God is doing in their lives. Have you ever asked yourselves what God is doing in your life? Elizabeth is older than Mary, wife of Zechariah. Zechariah did not believe the angel Gabriel’s announcement to him about the birth of a child to he and Elizabeth, and so he was unable to speak until the baby, John, was born. Mary, on the other hand, is contrasted with Zechariah for she believed Gabriel’s announcement that she would be the mother of the Son of God.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth speaks of the one who is promised as “my Lord.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary sings her song that magnifies the Lord, making him larger and greater to all the world.

As wonderful as this all is, “lowliness” characterizes these women. Mary may have been very poor and thus, “lowly.” She is also a woman who is pregnant without being married. She is in a mess. “Lowliness” describes her.

Lowliness may also describe you and me. We live in a time of great poverty and hunger in the world. We also see the poverty of our vision for the world in the midst of great violence terror, emptiness of a spirit of caring for one another. Instead we can see that our own pride and abuse of power, our living as though we don’t need a Savior, as though we are able to take care of ourselves, are reasons for God to humble us. Could it be that God is humbling us through all the events that are taking place in our world? In our lowliness, we may think that we are unworthy of a message from an angel.

Mildred was my father’s wife, our children’s grandmother for the last 22 years. Mildred and my father may be considered part of the lowly ones. Though not poor, at 92 and 91 they were people whom society might think of as no longer needed. Who would listen to these almost centenarians?

Every Sunday Dad and Mildred were in church at Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne. She went to church every week for quilting, just like my mother before her. They both attended Bible class of Sunday. I can see them both ascending the few steps to the altar to receive Communion; my father who needs a walker to keep him steady as he walks, and Mildred whose own frail body seemed to have little strength at times. They both would go forward believing the Promise that in this bread and wine Jesus Christ came into them and filled them with hope. They went forward again and again, even though their bodies were failing, believing the Promise of healing in Jesus Christ.

Then Mildred falls at home, overcome by a stroke, and my father, unable to lift her, comforts her, brings her a blanket on the floor, and calls the emergency number. The stroke leaves her unable to use her right side, unable to speak and unable to swallow. Rather than having a feeding

tube inserted, both Mildred and my father long before chose to have no extreme measures taken to keep them alive. She chose to have no nutrition and to trust the Promise of her Lord Jesus Christ, whom she also carried inside her all her life.

Living in a bed in a beautiful room at the Hospice Home in Fort Wayne, where Mildred was taken to die, she was able to see all of her family, her friends from church and other people for 10 days before she died. At her funeral service many of those same lowly ones came to magnify the Lord, the One who looks with favor on the lowliness of his servants.

His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

We could all join in magnifying the Lord at Mildred's funeral, because Jesus regards or looks with favor on the lowly. Elizabeth can join and we can all join Mary in singing that the mighty one has done great things for us, for the Mighty One is the child Mary is carrying, and the One we all carry inside of us.

His love for us turns the world upside down and because of His love and His presence in our lives, we leap for joy. Through Christ God's judgment on our sin and our suffering is healed and we are made whole. God counts us worthy to receive a message from the angels that this Jesus Christ is coming and has already come for us too.

Elizabeth says or sings, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord." Mildred believed that too.

Jesus Christ, who is born into lowliness and poverty is the one whose love is able to turn the world upside down, so that those who are beaten down, lowly and depressed are raised up, the hungry are filled with good things. Even though he has no tomb of his own, he rises from death to give us life forever, and He keeps on calling us to raise up the lowly as our mission in the world.

Mary, keep on singing your song. Sing to us of this God of love. Keep on singing this song until your song becomes our song. We keep on singing Mary's song in the face of the darkness of fear, violence, hunger, war, injustice, and poverty, until all the world can hear the song and sing along, and the hungry are fed and the poor and the lowly are lifted up.

Jesus Christ comes to rich and poor alike, to those who, like Zechariah, find it had to believe the message of the Gabriel, to all who long for a world which magnifies the Lord, Jesus comes to lift up the lowly. We look forward to joining Mildred, and all of our loved ones and all the angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all people. Amen.