



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, Pa
Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
3rd Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020
Sermon Title: "Our Communal Song of Praise"
Sermon Text: Luke 1:46

Mary and Elizabeth instinctively knew just how important it was to connect with one another. These two women whose pregnancies were unlikely. These two women who had been visited by God's messenger and drawn into the birthing of hope were living into the birthing of that hope while being surrounded by indicators to the contrary. The people of Israel had waited for a Messiah. For ever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever and...I may be underestimating just how long they were waiting and wondering if a promised brighter day would really ever come. And now, they needed to connect with each other in a communal song of praise to sustain that hope and wonder and probably anxiety even.

Elizabeth, upon seeing Mary tells bursts forth, "blessed is the one who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." To which Mary, sings back, "My should magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior! "But after this will be more waiting, for babies to be born and sons to grow up and God's promises to unfold. The road will not be without continued hoping and wondering and anxieties along the way.

One of the stark realities of this pandemic is the revealing of just how much we too need communion. By "communion" I mean how much we need to be in contact and connection with one another, and with the sign of hope we know in the sacraments- these things reveal Christ to us, we say as Christians. We too hear the message of hope that what is promised will be fulfilled. We are promised that Christ will come to us.

Yesterday I shared in the holy privilege of communing with some of our beloveds at the Village at Penn State. Only 24 can be there, distanced and masked. No one fights those limits because the hunger for communing is so great. And in this age where we have all had to learn how to read each other from the mask up, perhaps you too have learned how much our eyes tell. Our brains are helping us learn more from each other even when it seems we have less. There is a gift from God I wasn't looking for. Even this small thing magnifies our experience these days.

Eyes closed in profound gratitude as Koya played "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and it was as if Christ entered and pulled up a seat. As is often the case when sharing electronic devices, we worked through some technical glitches with microphones and the screen for showing a video spontaneously rolled back up and then back down and the computer was getting a little sassy. But the eyes in the room could laugh, and sigh at how we all face these kinds of challenges.

In the end, we could hear, and see. We heard and envisioned Elizabeth telling Mary that blessed is the one who believes God's promises will be fulfilled. And Mary's soul responding with her own song of praise that magnifies her Lord.

In our age, many of us find our eyes need that magnification for the every day tasks. I can be frustrated at what my eyes will and will not do, not to mention the mask and glasses combination which often clouds my view. But our eyes also know that as we

search for hope we need moments where God is magnified for us. In our waiting and anxieties, just as was true for Elizabeth and Mary, and has been true for people across time, if hope feels deferred, or delayed, our eyes perhaps might miss it. We might just miss that Christ is with us.

Music has provided this gateway into the divine for almost as long as humans have been around. And so it so fitting that this Sunday, our Lessons and Carols Sunday, the small snippet of two women singing to one another a communal song of God can be a touch point for us. Over time, music has been used to magnify our prayers, indeed for some of us, myself included, it is how we pray. Music has been used to teach, and to console, to celebrate and to elevate. It lifts our souls and in some way, the distance between us and our God is lessened as we transcend what otherwise is our view of the world around us. Music magnifies our perspective. Perhaps each of us can think of songs that function this way, not the least of which are things like "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve which I cannot sing without tears in my eyes.

So how about now, in this time when we cannot gather in the same way, and where people around us are bellowing that by being safe we are "cancelling Christmas?" Well, the dear Christ still enters in.

And one lovely way we have to enter into communion with Christ and each other, though just as unexpected as those babies for Mary and Elizabeth, is the sharing of virtual choir music videos. Our Grace musicians singing beloved songs of faith like "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Hark the Herald Angels" and "Go Tell it on The Mountain" and more will carry us into the story. Yesterday at the Village I watched those eyes fill up and the delight in the eyes of our beloveds was palpable as they listened. They looked for familiar faces and rejoiced in our youth singing and playing, realizing that our youth too feel keenly the separation these days. We are drawn into communion in that as well. And yet, what the music ushered in was the promise of Emmanuel. "God with us" was magnified thanks to those gifted ones. The large screen didn't hurt either. We don't know for sure when we will gather again safely, but we were in fact well and truly fed. Blessed are those who believe God's promises will be fulfilled. Just as was true for Mary and Elizabeth, so it is for all of us. it doesn't change the road we are walking, but it surely helps us to travel it. As you watch the music videos so lovingly prepared and produced to the glory of God and out of love, may your spirits rejoice in God our Savior. From generation to generation, the songs of praise remind us that even in ways we couldn't envision, the mighty is still doing great thing for us in love and in mercy. Come, let us adore Him in our communal song of praise.