

December 3, 2022

Second Sunday of Advent

Hebrews 11:8–13

Luke 1:5–17, 24–25

### “We Wait and Respond”

1. Our passages today challenge us with what I think is a particularly difficult question: when do we tell others what we think God is up to in our lives?
  - a. Let's focus on the two women in our passages, Sarah and Elizabeth
    - i. It's important to note that we know the names of both of these women, Sarah and Elizabeth, because time and again there are stories where we don't get to know the names of female biblical characters
    - ii. Their lives are separated by hundreds of years, but they are united in a single story line: they wanted to have children but could not.
    - iii. That's a journey so many of us know personally
    - iv. We know the dreams, the plans, the medical procedures, the questions (“when are you guys starting a family?”) the disappointment
    - v. It's hard to talk about it, so it's a conversation kept close to the heart, only letting in only some relatives, some dear friends
  - b. The whole notion of being able to have a child (or not being able to) is a storyline that happens again and again in the Bible
    - i. For Sarah and Elizabeth their journeys were arduous and with plot twists
      1. Sarah and Elizabeth were faithful women who followed God
        - a. God had spoken to Sarah and Abraham, and told them to depart from their land near present day Iraq and go to present day Palestine.
          - i. God promised them countless descendants and a land to call home
        - b. Elizabeth and Zachariah had served the Lord being in a priestly family
          - i. They were both from a priestly line, though only Zachariah served in an official capacity
          - ii. They were known for their faithfulness
      2. Sarah and Elizabeth wondered why God was delayed in God's promise

- a. Both of them were late in life, and they figured that whatever chance they had to have a child was gone
- ii. Elizabeth articulates that not having a baby meant a disgrace in the eyes of the community
  - 1. Back then, there was a stigma, a sense of shame, connected to not being able to have a child
  - 2. In some ways, the emotional trauma and judgement is similar today
- c. Both Sarah and Elizabeth (or their husbands) are visited by a messenger from God, an angel, who promises them a child to be born to them in their old age!
  - i. Sarah and Abraham are visited by messengers as they were at home
  - ii. Zachariah sees the messenger from God while inside the temple in Jerusalem
- d. For Elizabeth, when she realizes she is pregnant, one can only imagine the emotions she went through
  - i. I wonder if she sighed: here we go again. Is disappointment coming yet again?
  - ii. Or: when do I get to think this will be real?
  - iii. Because we know that parents who have tried and been unable to conceive have had heartache and maybe even the loss of a pregnancy
  - iv. Since we know Elizabeth was faithful, and understood God to be faithful, so probably there is some tension with faith and feelings
  - v. But we hear of something very specific which Elizabeth does: she hides.
    - 1. Here is the origin of the question I raised: when do we tell others what we think God is up to in our lives?
    - 2. Elizabeth and Zachariah knew God was up to something, but she hesitated telling others
    - 3. No ultrasound pictures, no gender reveal party, no baby shower.
    - 4. Instead Elizabeth hides
    - 5. But the hiding she does is from the curious or judgmental eyes of the neighbors
    - 6. She doesn't hide from God or from Zachariah.

7. Still, it feels like an emotional decision she made.
      - vi. And yet the hiding isn't presented as an unfaithful decision by Elizabeth, but it seems to be a very human response to the surprising work of God in her: taking a moment to gather herself before letting the world know what God is up to
  2. Both Sarah and Elizabeth acted in faith and in hope, and they proclaimed the work God was doing in them
    - a. The Hebrews passage reminds us Sarah and Abraham were given a promise of descendants and land, but neither got to see the promises fully.
      - i. Yet they followed the Lord even through the uncertainty!
    - b. The Gospel passage recounts the shocking way in which Zachariah heard the promise of a child
      - i. Yet Elizabeth and Zachariah believed in their hearts the promise would come true, and Elizabeth declared: God has done this! This blessing comes from God!
  3. In Advent, we are called to respond to God's call, to come out of hiding to declare what God is doing in our lives
    - a. Recently, a friend I hadn't heard from in years called me out of the blue to share with me what God is doing in her life.
      - i. She hesitated speaking to others, because she experienced a spiritual encounter which doesn't fit a logical, scientific mindset or a skeptical worldview
      - ii. But she was thrilled to feel closer to God because of it
    - b. But it isn't always the "happy" stories I hear
      - i. I have people come talk to me to struggle with silence from God or half-messages
      - ii. I have people who are in a way hiding from others the turmoil or pain their situation is creating – but they want to speak the words aloud in a context of safety and no judgement.
    - c. Maybe you and I are in an Elizabeth moment, where it feels like God is doing something good with us, but we hesitate to celebrate fully because we fear disappointment or heartache.
      - i. Or maybe we're in an Elizabeth moment because of the cumulative effect of the stinging judgement of others
      - ii. Advent calls us out of hiding, calls us to put our hope and trust in God

- iii. Advent calls us out of hiding, and when we do, we'll discover so many others who are likewise biding their time.
  - iv. Advent calls us out of hiding, to respond to our waiting with the faithfulness which has carried us through, to respond to hope with trust.
4. May our waiting and God's promises be fulfilled.