

December 19, 2021 The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Luke 1:39-45

The Power of a Visit

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Tick, tock. Tick tock. Tick tock. I do not think that clock has ever sounded louder she thought to herself. She tried to fight the urge but her eyes kept finding their way back. 2:57 PM. Just one minute later than the last time she checked. Her daughter was coming to visit her at 3. She could not decide whether time was moving at an incredibly slow or fast pace. In the moments when she was filled with anticipation for the visit to come it seemed to be moving slowly. When she was filled with anxiety it seemed to be hurtling forward at a breathtaking speed. She had not seen her daughter in several years and the last time had been less than perfect. Angry words had been exchanged. But she had hopes that this would be a visit of reconciliation. As the time grew closer her hopes grew and grew and grew.

Another time and place and different people. A husband and wife waiting just outside airport security. "Is that him? Is that him?" "Honey, not every college kid with a backpack is our son." "Okay, I admit it, I might be just a little amped up. After all this is the first time we have ever gone three months without seeing him." "You don't need to tell me, I have been counting down the days since Halloween."

Another time and place and different people. A young man driving in his car. He comes around the bend to see the sign for his hometown. Just another couple of miles to his best friend from childhood's house. "It will be great to reconnect" he thought to himself. I am not even sure who I am anymore. Good old Ben, will cut through all of the nonsense and remind me of exactly where I came from and who I truly am.

Visits can and do shape our lives. My friend Margaret Fox writes this about visits. "A visit has a purpose—it's a planned thing—and it requires preparation, some act of intent—it's different than bumping into someone on the street...it requires purpose and intentionality...A visit requires travel, to and from it requires crossing a threshold or arranging a time and place." And visits come with expectations.

Today's scripture text from Luke brings us word of a visit, a momentous visit between Mary and Elizabeth, and in some ways, between Jesus and John the Baptist. Mary has just received a visit from the angel Gabriel and her world has been turned upside down with the announcement that she will bear the very Son of God. How does one so young begin to comprehend such overwhelming news? How could any of us? How does one respond to the impossible????

We are told she makes haste and journeys out to the home of her cousin Elizabeth who is also with child. We are not given any insight into what Mary is thinking but I believe we could hazard a few educated guesses. As she rushed along on her journey I am sure her mind was whirling. "How is this possible?" "Is this really even true?" "The Son of God, growing inside of

me?" "Maybe I was just hallucinating?" "But what if I wasn't?"
"If it is actually true what the heck do I do?"

When she entered Elizabeth's house Mary must have wondered how she could even begin a conversation about this wild and outlandish situation. But Mary did not need to utter a word. The child in Elizabeth's womb leapt at the sound of Mary's voice. It is as if John the Baptist is already reaching for Jesus. And the Holy Spirit immediately revealed the truth to Elizabeth. She is the first person to recognize the identity of the one being born into the world to save us all. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Visits can be momentous events. Coming together can illuminate and clarify things both great and small. For Mary, this visit with Elizabeth was both illuminating and clarifying. When Mary is with Gabriel her words are either questioning or ones of humble service. After her visit with Elizabeth, Mary has been energized and empowered. She speaks boldly of what is to come for this child to whom she will give birth and for the entire world. Mary makes an audacious announcement about messiah on the way.

On the first Sunday in Advent Mel preached on the power and importance of Mary's Magnificat, the speech she gives after her visit with Elizabeth. If you were not here I encourage you to go online and check it out.

Obviously, Mary's life was remarkably transformed by her visit with the angel Gabriel. But what is also true is that she was just as transformed by her visit with her cousin Elizabeth. She goes from someone being acted upon to someone who acts upon

the world, proclaiming the very first sermon ever preached about Jesus Christ. Visits can change our lives. They certainly can.

There was likely a time in many of our lives when we may have taken visits for granted. We used to visit all the time; with friends across the street, and with family and loved ones across the country. Without a second thought we filled up our calendars with opportunities to gather together. And then the pandemic came and stripped away so many of those visits from us for far longer than we would have ever previously thought possible. We hungered for those lost visits. It was as if we were denied a basic food group, as if we were plants prohibited from receiving sunshine. Yes, we made do, with phone calls and zoom calls but it was not quite the same, was it?

And now, thanks to vaccinations and boosters, some of our beloved visits have begun to return to our lives. What a joy it has been. There it is on our calendar coming up in just a few days. We savor the anticipation of seeing an old friend or loved one again. We prepare for their arrival. A little extra vacuuming and dusting. We go out and purchase their favorite snacks and beverage. We think about the stories we have to tell. Both the new ones and the old stories of shared memory. When visits are over we often enjoy reliving them in our minds, relishing the moments shared.

Yes, we value visits. But in the midst of how much we often enjoy visits we sometimes overlook how much we can be shaped by visits. When we feel a little lost in our lives, a visit from an old friend can remind us of who we truly are. When our lives are on autopilot and things are just humming

along a visit with someone new can open our eyes to possibilities we have never considered.

The season of Advent is all about visits both the ones with our friends and loved ones and with the arrival of the Son of God in our midst. Every year we speak of how advent is a time of preparation for Christ's arrival. And we are told to wait with great expectation. But what exactly does that mean?

Thinking about Jesus Christ's arrival in our midst in terms of a momentous visit may help us think about this. If visits can change our lives, surely a visit from the Son of God will change our lives. If visits can reconcile us and reconnect us with those with whom we have grown distant a visit from the Son of God will surely reignite our relationship with the divine. If visits can remind us of who we truly are, the Son of God can surely reawaken in us our identity as beloved and cherished children of God.

Mary was transformed by her visit with Elizabeth. Before her visit we see her as a humble servant of the Lord who has been the recipient of the most unbelievable news. After her visit with Elizabeth she is a bold proclaimer, one could argue she has become a prophet. With eloquence and passion she announces to the world of both the mercy and might of our God.

I have no idea exactly how a visit by the Son of God will transform you or me or all of us together. But let us experience the season with the same level of intention and anticipation we bring to the most momentous of visits. For he is indeed coming; the bringer of wisdom; the embodiment of

grace; the one who calls us by name; the one who claims us for all eternity. He is coming to see each one of us.

Let our hearts be filled with wonder and joy and expectation for the visit that awaits us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.