Dec. 11, 2016
Lesson 2
An Affirmation of the Promise: Luke 1:39-56

Context:

Today's reading continues with the Gospel of the Luke in the story that narrates Jesus’ birth. Last week we heard of how Mary was approached by the angel and told that she would give birth to the Son of God. Traveling from Nazareth to a city in Judea, Mary has to share the news with someone that she trusts completely. Today we get to see her share that news with her cousin Elizabeth who is older in age and also pregnant. Elizabeth in fact will give birth to Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist.

What follows is any conversation when people share news with their loved ones whenever they have news. There is excitement about what is to come and that fact that Mary will give birth to the Lord. You can hear the excitement in their voices as they talk.

The words that follow in Mary’s speech are known as “Mary's Magnificat.” Numerous composers and musicians have taken her words and compiled various songs and choral pieces to illuminate how her words speak truth to power. Preachers have preached the text to remind us that God is the one in charge and the favorites in our world are not necessarily God's favorites. In the words we hear that Mary affirms that everything she does is out of her love for God. Because of God she has experienced great things. But she also addresses that God does great things for many people: blessing generation to generation, scattering those who are proud and exalting the humble, filling the hungry and dismissing the rich, and always remembering the covenant made with Israel by always being with God’s people.

After her speech, Mary stays with Elizabeth and then returns home. One would assume that the time spent together is one to prepare themselves for everything that is about to occur.

Application:

There are several things that should stick out to us about the scripture lesson for today. The first is that Mary went to share her news with Elizabeth, a cousin who was older and also pregnant. Elizabeth is the wife of a priest and Mary is a young single woman. They have very different life experiences. The description of their encounters describes a scene of joy, one in which both women are affirmed by one another. When they talk about their lives, there is a trust that is there. And they both share with each other regardless of their stations in life.

It asks the question of who are your spiritual mentors that you share life alongside. As a young pastor, I know that I have grown tremendously by the time that older clergy colleagues have invested in me. Even though some are busy and have lots of things on their plates, they always make time to talk to me about ministry and about my life. Whether it is going to get lunch, doing recreational activities together, sending a quick text, or a phone call, they intentionally make that space to share their lives with someone else. What I am often surprised to learn is
that they appreciate that time as well as they remember someone who invested in them. And they feel supported in the relationship as well as they are given encouragement and care.

These kinds of relationships remind us that we all need one another for our own spiritual well-beings and for us to truly flourish. When Mary and Elizabeth met with one another, there was pure joy that they were in this journey together and that they could lean on one another. So if you don't have a younger or older person who you can share life alongside, find them. They will help you grow and you will see that the Lord can use you at any age to touch someone's life.

The second thing that leaps out today is the power that is in Mary's Magnificat. Last week we read about how Mary had the heart of a servant, one who was honored and excited to be a servant of the Lord. In this next speech though, Mary is a prophet. She speaks of the power of God and how God will tear down those institutions and powers to do something new. It begs us to look at the own powers of our world: who do we venerate and why do we venerate them? Often we put celebrities, politicians, political parties, and power players as those as the ones we put our sole trust in for our future and for our lives together. But Mary's speech says that God will overturn those and that God will remember those of the hungry and those who are servants.

Every time I read this speech, I feel convicted to remember that the powers of this world are not the ones that I am to put my sole trust in. My soul trust is to be in God and to think of how I am called to be a servant. And that may mean always questioning what happens around us so that we can become better disciples of Jesus Christ. Does this legislation take care of the poor? Does this new policy help someone or hurt them? Is this law just or fair? Does this leader treat all groups of people like our Lord would treat them? Have I done my job to help to take care of others? Am I doing what I am called to do to help others regardless of policies or politicians? While we may never know a direct response to these questions, we are reminded in Mary's speech that our God is one who is Lord of all peoples. And God often surprises us at who may be the major kingdom players in our world.