

Pastor Jon's Sermon from December 18/19 2021. The 4th Sunday in Advent

Text: Gospel of Luke 1:39-45

I finally went to the Neenah Dog Park this weekend with our dog, Badger. This amazing dog park in Neenah is just before the overpass heading over 41 north of the Trestle Trail. A neighbor invited me with their dog, and we met there. It sure felt good to be invited out.

For some reason watching those dogs greet one another reminded me of the visitation between Mary and Elizabeth in our Gospel. There was a whole lot of joy and blessing going on as I watched those dogs run and play. I was blessed and the dogs were blessed too.

Remember in the text, Mary set out to the hill country with haste. If a new dog showed up at the dog park the string of six other dogs would run as fast as they could to greet the new dog entering. Most of their tails were wagging as they sniffed the new dog's bottom and sorted things out.

Then one dog would take off and they all would follow. It was a beautiful site to watch the game of follow the leader. I started to get anxious, however, because after a while, my dog would not come when called. "Badger come," I would yell. I thought I was going to be there all day. But when he finally got tired, and I was able to grab his collar. Needless to say, we need to do a little more training. Not even treats would draw him in.

These dogs were set free to play and work in a safe environment... a safe space. I say work, because one of the dogs had herding instincts and would bark at the other dogs trying to herd them. Their owner was trying to curb that behavior, but then they told me he was part border collie and it all made sense. I found out my dog is a follower.

Mary went with haste to the Judean hillside because the angel Gabriel told her to go see Elizabeth, her older cousin. And she went. Against all odds, she did as the angel Gabriel told her. One thing we take from this text is Mary's faith or trust in God. As a 12-15 year old, this was a leap of faith to trust in God's plan for her to be the God bearer.

Elizabeth's greeting to Mary was amazing. It was so gracious and unexpected. She welcomed her with open arms and no words of

judgement. As an unwed pregnant girl, Mary would have been shamed in public. But Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, welcomed Mary with a loud greeting and called her blessed on several occasions. Her baby John, who became the Baptist, leapt in her womb. She said, “Why has the mother of my Lord, come to visit me? It is like you being here in church today? We are so blessed to have you here! What a gift you are!

Are we always that gracious when we greet people or welcome people? Or are we too caught up in our own muck or too quick to judge at first? It is easy to withdraw into our own worlds. I kinda feel we have lost this excitement when we see each other. When someone is genuinely excited to see you, it builds you up and lifts your spirits. Think of those dogs saying hi. They didn’t care what the other dog looked, like they just wanted to say hi. They were excited for every visitor who entered the gates. The grace of dogs...

After the babies danced in their wombs, Mary sang what is known as Mary’s Song or the Magnificat. Similar to Hannah’s Song in 1st Samuel after Hannah got pregnant against all odds.

In this deep theological conversation, these two women weren’t talking about the men in their lives, they were talking theological things about the hopes for their children and the world.

In Mary’s Song,

“Clearly no one may take comfort before God in their own status, power, privilege, or affluence.” The magnificat says that Jesus will cast them mighty down from their thrones and lift up the lowly to a place of status and agency. After all God lifted up Mary and countless others who didn’t have any status or power to do God’s work in the world. God can even use you and me.

Jesus will scatter the proud in their thoughts? Who are the proud in their thoughts? I think it is people who think they are all that and a bag of chips.

Keep in mind that in Jesus, no dimension of human life or culture social, economic, or political, will lie beyond the lordship of the Messiah. Jesus will rule over all dimensions of our lives and world. Do you believe that Jesus is Lord of all?

Think about this... all systems, businesses, and institutions will be judged by this new standard of divine justice and mercy.

So, as we prepare for Christmas this year, let us ponder Mary's faith, Elizabeth's Hospitality, and God's Justice and Mercy. May we too be filled with the Holy Spirit and feel blessed by God's presence in the world and in those we meet. May Christ's body, the church... you and I... live out Mary's song of great reversals, especially building up those who are bowed down.

Amen!