Springfield Presbyterian Church

December 18th, 2022

We See God in Each Other

1. A Divine Gathering

I love this beautiful sight where Mary is running to see her sister

because she loves Elizabeth and it seems like they already have a close relationship. It doesn’t seem to matter that there is a geographical distance from one another. Elizabeth meets Mary at the threshold and everything changes at that moment.

As a nerd, I have to tell you that the word ‘threshold’ is related to the Latin word ‘limen’ which can also be interpreted as liminal. So, indeed, Mary and Elizabeth are both at this threshold or liminal moment, when their worlds and the world at large is facing this new beginning, or this incredible change. They stand in this liminal space, while their baby boys jointly jump in their stomachs for joy for the blessings that are to come. It seems that even before a word is said, as Mary stands right at the doorway, they know that this space is incredibly sacred.

So, this morning, we join with their joy, and we join with them with the love that they feel growing within them for their babies, but even more so, with this knowledge that God is doing something miraculous within them both. They are able to look at one another and see beyond themselves, they see the divine presence of God active, perhaps jumping up and down, and they can’t help but to be overcome with emotion.

Elizabeth is overwhelmed, in a beautiful way, wondering how this can be, how can Mary, her sister, come to her, with her Lord in her womb? There’s a Hebrew sense here too at play – you can’t see the face of God, so imagine knowing that God is indwelling in your sister’s belly. That’s absolutely mind blowing – Elizabeth is at once both honored, humbled, and maybe even a little anxious.

Mary, as she sings her song of praise, seems to have grown in confidence from the Mary we talked about two weeks ago. No longer is an angel right there to assure her, she doesn’t need him anymore – she is here to sing and glorify God and is overjoyed, without question, fully embodying, this sense that God is not only here with them, but here to change the world as they know it. We even hear the name of our theme in Mary’s song, as she sings about the mercy that will extend from generation to generation. She is fully aware that this is no small act, but a joyful and wonderous thing happening within her and within Elizabeth.

When Mary and Elizabeth look at each other, they see the divine; they see God in each other. They see God at work in their lives, but they also see how God is impacting the world beyond them through their lives. They have a vision of something more that God is creating before their eyes and they get to be a part of it.

1. Invitation

The invitation is open to us today to do the same as Mary and

Elizabeth – to look at one another and see the divine acting in and through us for a greater good, generation to generation. Now, you could fairly say, “How could we ever replicate a moment like this – I’m not carrying the son of God. There’s no way we could have the same interaction.”

Here’s the good news, you don’t need to be carrying the Messiah in your womb to see God in one another. You can look at life a little differently, though, and I’ll try to offer some helpful examples through this idea of the threshold moments.

We all have threshold moments in our lives, right? Whether that’s a new job, a birth of a child, or a move to a new household – something significant is happening in this time and place. You may be the one to sign the papers, to show up on that first day of work, but we know that there is a greater story that is being woven as you do what seems ordinary. Who is there with you? Who is by your side, seeing all that you are facing and looks upon you with love?

Sometimes, I think, which is unfortunate but true, that we get a clearer picture of who is at the threshold when life gets tough. When we have lost a job, when a loved one has passed onto greater glory, or you get a diagnosis that shakes you to your very core – who is there? Who is not only there on day zero, but the month after, or years after, still meeting you in the threshold space, asking you how you are, or maybe simply sitting with you?

As we get swept up in the events of our own lives, it’s easy to forget to make those phone calls and to meet people at the threshold. In fact, it’s innately human – because the world spins madly on, and it’s a rare moment that there is that much time, stillness, and silence, to have the moment of liminality that Mary and Elizabeth shared.

Yet the threshold offers a unique invitation – an invitation to see these big moments in one another’s lives and acknowledge the God who is moving and breathing life in this time and place. It’s hard, it’s so hard to slow down, but when we do, we get the unique and sacred opportunity to see God in one another.

1. Less abstract

But, let me even get less abstract – let me share with you a story

of my own. As many of you know, I had a threshold moment a few years ago when I was given the official diagnosis of Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia. I distinctly remember, like a polaroid, sitting next to the doctor’s desk and my cousin Irene next to me and hearing the words, “This disease does not need to define you.” Yet, I was still stuck on his earlier sentence, the one where I heard the word ‘paraplegia’ and I thought my heart stopped for a moment. What, what do you mean this doesn’t define me? It’s good to have an answer, but here, in this moment, everything has changed. You can’t fix this, you can’t cure this, and I’m stepping over the threshold from the unknown to the known and…I had no idea what to do with this information.

I remember my cousin telling me later that when she left the room with me, she went over and told her husband, Dan, who was in the waiting room, “This is bad. This is very bad.” All we knew is that we had a lap-full of papers that explained this disease, but no room in our brains to read it.

Now that I’m a few years into knowing the diagnosis, I often look back on that threshold moment and the moments that would follow after. Who was there? Irene and Dan were right there and continue to be there. Bryan and I were newly dating and I texted him the news – which, in hindsight, is not a good idea – but I didn’t want to talk. He called, and called, and called – and I finally picked up and I blurted out to him, “If you want out, I understand. It won’t make you less of a man, I want the best for you.” And on the other side of the phone, there he was, “Listen, you are more than just a diagnosis or a disability, I’m in this for the long haul, no matter what.” And Springfield saw me, and you continue to check in and check up on me. There were those folks who didn’t show up, and I’m not mad, they have their own lives and their own stories, but when life happens, you remember who shows up.

I tell you all this to give you a picture of the threshold moment for me, but what has happened in the meantime is perhaps more significant because it has offered an invitation. I continue to ask, “Where is God in this? What is God doing in and through me with this diagnosis?” And, I assure you, oh I do, that I have my moments of anger and sadness, but at my core, I believe that God is doing something within me, I can see the divine in me, weaving a tapestry and I probably won’t get the full picture of until I pass on.

Sometimes, I think stories help, and again, I share it with you because even in something that doesn’t feel great, you can see the divine within me. What is glorious too, is that I also see God within you. There’s a line that Pastor Janna from Northminster would greet me with, but I’m not sure its origin, but she would say, “The God in me bows to the God in you.” Perhaps it is wonderful as that, as pure as the story of Mary and Elizabeth, where we look at one another, in our joy and in our sadness, especially in those threshold moments, where we have a changed mindset – where we look at one another and see more than skin and bones – but souls divinely touched by God and living and breathing by the power of the Holy Spirit. My friends, I pray that you see God in you and others, this day, and always. Amen.