



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Fourth Sunday of Advent

readings: [Micah 5.2-5a](#), [Hebrews 10.5-10](#)

19th December 2021

I wonder how you're feeling at the moment? As we're approaching Christmas and the infection rate rises I'm sure that like me you are feeling a mixture of things – busyness, tiredness, anxiety, uncertainty. I wonder whether you feel primarily like you are in a race or like time is in limbo? Racing to complete everything you want to before Christmas and hoping that Covid won't catch up on you and your loved ones and necessitate a complete change of plans. In limbo because everything is changing and you're wondering whether family will be able to gather together, whether you ought to cancel no-vital engagements and whether at the last minute worship might have to move to being online due to Government restrictions and regulations.

It feels like we are definitely watching and waiting, praying and hoping with bated breath this year – wondering whether we will be able to celebrate Christmas or whether we will be remembering Christ's birth alone and isolated again as we did last year.

In our Gospel reading, the Angel Gabriel broke into the reality of Elizabeth and Mary's life and brought them a message from God. I'm sure that many of us are longing for someone authoritative to come to us, to tell us not to be afraid and offer us peace and tell us what to do. Instead, we have to listen carefully for God's Spirit within us, speaking those words of peace, telling us not to be afraid for God is with us and the one who calls us is faithful. Elizabeth heard about the angel's message from Zechariah her husband and he struggled to believe the message and as a result was mute. So Elizabeth spent most of her confinement alone at home with a husband who couldn't talk. Mary's experience was different as she believed that angel's message responding, 'let it be to me according to your word'.

These two women were experiencing their first pregnancy and Mary's instincts were to go and spend her confinement with Elizabeth. They spent the best part of three months together sharing their stories and experiences. While I was carrying my youngest, I spent 13 weeks in isolation in hospital primarily bedridden and it was such a joy when people came to visit me and shared with me news and stories of life outside the hospital, and we were able to talk and share what was going on for us.

As Mary and Elizabeth spent time together, they found the presence of God was with them in their relationship, in each other and in the space between them. They were a gift to one another. Elizabeth's baby leapt within her womb, and she was acutely aware of the presence of God's presence with her. She felt humbled and blessed and that God had been gracious to her sending the mother of her Lord to her.

I wonder who you go to when times are difficult. Who can you spend time with and be real with and tell them with honesty and openness what life is really like for you. It's in those deep relationships that God breaks in and through and meets with us and touches our hearts and minds and brings peace, comfort, courage, strength and the resilience that we need. This passage encourages us to think of ways in which we can be there for one another – the beginning of the Bible shows us that when God created humanity, God recognized that it was not good for us to be alone and hence made a partner for Adam, Eve. We all need each other and encounter Christ in and through other people. At this difficult time, who are the people who resource you and help you to hear Christ speaking to you and give you the courage and strength you

need to manage the myriad things life throws at you? And who are the people that you are actively reaching out to, supporting, loving and holding and being as Christ to? In these difficult days we need each other more than ever. And we also need to be mindful of the people who most easily bear the worst of our anxiety and stress – the people we shout at and moan at and let steam off with, those who experience us at our worst. Now is the time to think about how we impact upon others and especially those we encounter most often. This passage encourages us to allow God to minister in and through our closest relationships.

Jesus models for us what it means to be truly human, and this passage shows us the blessing of family and friends who come alongside us and watch and wait and hope and pray with us as we experience the now and the not yet of God's kingdom in our midst and as we await the coming of Christ.

As a result of their relationship, both women were filled with peace and their hearts overflowed with faith and with thanksgiving. I pray that this Christmas time we too might find friends and relationships that enable us to do that too. People who can help us bring our burdens to God and leave them at the foot of the cross so that through leaving our worries with Christ in prayer we can experience the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding and know the reality of God with us.

The final words recorded in the passage by Elizabeth say, 'Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.' Sharing our stories and realities with those who truly love us, praying together and holding one another in love builds our faith and helps us hear God's voice and recognize God's presence amongst us. May we have the faith and trust to believe all God's promises to us and to watch and wait and pray with hope in our hearts this Christmas time.

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