

Waiting at the door with Elizabeth and Mary

Luke 1:39-56

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Advent 3

All of this happens in the doorway. Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house - the cousins exchange greetings. We could ask the same question of Mary that Mary asked of the angel some months ago. When the angel came to Mary she wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Now we get a strange greeting exchange between Elizabeth and Mary. It all happens in the doorway - between outside and inside, journey and home, between this world and the next, between what has been and what is yet to be. What kind of greeting is this? A long greeting indeed, much to digest. Mary greets with poem of the heart and gut that sings of God's mighty deeds - what God has done and will do in this eon and the next. Rulers come down from thrones, the humble are lifted up, the hungry are filled, and the rich sent away with hunger pangs. God makes promises and keeps them - all of this before Elizabeth bids her "come on in."

We live in a time and place that is remarkably different from the time of Mary and Elizabeth, yet much happens in our doorways as well. I am thinking of those moments when we simply (although it is not simple really) welcome our friends into the house. The doorbell rings. We go the door already happy expectant, we open the door, and there they are. What we expected has happened. They are here.... But they look different - just slightly. When the door opens we scan each other in microseconds. Guest look at hosts, hosts at guests. We all look a wee bit different than the last time we saw each - and we have to adjust - take it in. Different clothing, hair, and perhaps different dispositions. (Remember - micro seconds.) We are actually getting reacquainted in this moment at the door. We process a lot in the first second or two at the door - even with people we are very close to. We can tell if they are happy - we can also tell if they have had an argument on the way over. This all happens before we say the familiar, "How are you?"

Good to see you! Come on in!” Words vary of course and our tone will be different based on our microsecond scan.

And then there is the body stuff. How do we move in the small place at the door especially if there is little crowd? If there are five guests and three greeters it gets tricky. Who greets whom first and how do they do it? Our bodies bump into each other in interesting, awkward ways. Is it going to be a simple hello, handshakes, hugs? Will there be kissing? Who gets a hug and who gets a handshake?

Then there is the move from the doorway, foyer, porch, mudroom to the next room. Again, a complex event. Where will we settle first? To the kitchen, to the living room, do the kids go downstairs? This is all in the first 10 – 30 seconds. If we think this is a lot. Think of all the dynamics for Elizabeth and Mary - there is a baby in utero reacting to all of this.

It all happens in the doorway - this good news. Good for some. (Uncomfortable news for others. I wonder if Zechariah is thinking about supper – hoping he does not get sent away hungry – at least not yet.)

I am rejoicing today in this threshold story of incarnation. Elizabeth’s doorway, our doorways, all doorways are blessed – are forever changed - by this event. Doorways are forever places of incarnation. Angels come to shepherds and Jesus is laid in a manger showing that Christ comes to the poorest of the poor. We speak of the mystery of incarnation this way. The angel comes to Mary – a young woman is the location of God’s new event. We speak of incarnation this way. The star shines for the Magi – the world, the cosmos is blessed by God. We speak of incarnation in this way. God speaks on farms, works in wombs, and floods the sky. God is in these locations and can use these places to bless humanity and creation. With this threshold story – we see that God comes to us in our doorways. God speaks words of power in the simple place where we simply greet each

other.

I wonder how the moment at the door continued

53 He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.

It was Elizabeth's turn to speak after that. What does she say? What would you say at your house if a friend came in with a poetic eternity encompassing prophesy of the highest order of which she is the mother of it all – just there in your doorway.

“Hallelujah! Tea?”

I wonder if they laughed, if they wept. Surely they embraced. Mary's feet would have to be washed, she would need to rest, and then it would be supper time. I wonder what they talked about over supper. It would be the women speaking to each other. Zechariah is mum and Joseph is not mentioned. Whatever happened later that day, nothing was ever the same again. They were different people after the event at the door than they were before Mary came through the door. They were transformed in small (and big) ways by the presence of God in the doorway.

And so it is with us. Those common greetings at the door are forever blessed by God. God shows up in doorways. God is at the threshold. God dwells in places where we cross from desert to home, from death to life, life to death. God is there in those places where guests and hosts meet. God is there when we cross the threshold from one chapter of our life to another. God is there when we cross from the heaviness of sin to forgiveness.

God is there in doorways, not blocking the door, but bidding us to come through, ushering us through. And we are transformed.