Holiness Abounds

Luke 1:39-55

Advent 4

December 19, 2021\*

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God….

Good Morning!

Mary and Elizabeth

Having said, “*Hear I am, the servant of the Lord*,” and immediately after the angel departed, Mary went with haste to the hills of Judea, to see her cousin Elizabeth.

Did she go—because an angel had just asked her to have God’s son? (Try explaining that to your friends.)

Did she go because she was an engaged woman, who had not slept with her beloved and was now pregnant and was by all standards in serious societal trouble?

Did she walk those miles, hoping and longing that somehow the world being turned upside down, was maybe true and perhaps like the vision from above said, her cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant?

Which for Elizabeth to be pregnant—that would be considered a miracle by anyone’s standards. She is super old, never had a child, and Zachariah—is well, well past his prime.

I have this image of Mary walking—cautious of her surroundings—traveling by herself—unaccompanied by a man; then the surprise of Elizabeth, when she suddenly shows up. How does Mary explain why she’s there? What if Elizabeth isn’t pregnant? Then what? Then Mary is pregnant, unmarried, poor, young—her life is ruined.

My first year in college one of my younger cousins got pregnant. She was 17 and my mom’s sister [is under the best of circumstances not that much fun] was not happy. My cousin from Long Island traveled to VA and moved in with my parents for the duration of her pregnancy. Because my mom, was the aunt with whom you could do that. My cousin’s mom was furious. My mom, while upset with the situation, could completely be with my cousin and love her, unconditionally. My mom was my cousin’s Elizabeth. For, I have this image of Mary thinking, *well if nothing else, maybe Elizabeth will care for me and keep me safe.*

Imagine the weight and the fear that Mary carries. She’s pregnant, the world is going to judge her, disdain her, how does she even begin to explain. She arrives at Elizabeth and Zachariah’s home, she calls out. Elizabeth greets her, surprised and curious, then when Elizabeth goes to hug Mary, as Elizabeth embraces Mary, her child, the child whom the angel told her husband about, Elizabeth’s soon-to-be son, the one she longed for 50 long years, her child leaps in her 70 year-old womb.

And then Elizabeth knows—holiness abounds—Mary too is with child: hopes on the horizon, now seem close, the margins have begun to move toward the center.

Elizabeth sees Mary and Elizabeth’s baby, leaps for joy, for he knows that the messiah has drawn near. Now Elizabeth knows that the child dancing in her womb is part of a larger plan. And Mary now knows, despite the odds and the absurdity—what the angel said, what the holy one offered—it’s all true.

Just for a moment try to pretend you’ve not heard all of this before. Try for a moment to put yourself in that room with two women, two women who have never had much and been given even less, and

see their faces,

hear their laughter,

feel their love,

behold their delight

 as they begin to realize that their bodies are about to launch the slow, seriously slow transformation of our world. Imagine how they hold each other, how they look at one another, how they gasp, laugh and cry.

This then is the place I long for us to go, the piece I long for us to embody. When the Holy comes near, when the holy approaches our lives might it be, that we say, “Yes?” In this time of profound chaos, chronic trauma and Advent expectation, in spite of it all, might we risk saying, “yes,”?

Then having said, “yes,” may we be prepared to act. To know that holiness can never be contained. To know that holiness always drives us to connect with others. Holiness cannot be held by ourselves for long. For holiness, breaks open our hearts, pours out and demands that we move with it reaching out to others.

My friends, holiness is about to come, again. When it knocks on your door, may we have the courage to say “yes.” May we go with haste to share God’s blessing, *for my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*

This day and always.

Amen.