

“From Generation to Generation: We See God in Each Other”

Luke 1:39-45

John O’Donohue once wrote, “Your soul friend, is the truest mirror to reflect your soul. The honesty and clarity of true friendship also brings out the real contour of your spirit.” We need others (humans and more than human beings) to help us on this journey of faith. Here is a beautiful example of that in this video called “Different realities”:

<https://youtu.be/6lkZmR1hDNU>.

It is so easy to miss the image of God in ourselves and others as we tend to focus on the flaws and mistakes of ourselves and of others. We need others who can help us see the goodness of the divine reality in our lives. Our Bible story for today is about the power of deep connections between two women who become God’s conduits to bringing so much healing and love into our world. This is the power of the friendship between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Elizabeth shared and listened to God’s dream in Mary. Mary was her younger cousin, and Elizabeth could have taken on the role of judgment against Mary. She could have warned Mary about all the possible dangers ahead and made her dream into a nightmare of fear. But Elizabeth was deeply grounded in God’s dream herself and thus was able to see God in Mary’s life and pregnancy. When Mary got the news of her pregnancy, she went to visit her relative/cousin Elizabeth for three months. This would have been a long journey of about 80 miles. One would not take that kind of journey lightly. Mary spent the first three months of her pregnancy with Elizabeth. We know that the first three months are the most critical in any pregnancy. Without the support of Elizabeth, Mary could not have made it through this challenge in her life. Her ability to carry out the mission of her life depended on Elizabeth’s deep listening, support, and mentoring. Elizabeth was the best support Mary could have had. We know this from the story of Elizabeth herself and from the greeting she gave Mary when she first saw her.

Elizabeth knew about faith, life, and brokenness in her life. She was unable to get pregnant for many years and struggled with the shame of that in her community. She was especially ashamed as she was the wife of a priest. Infertility would have been seen as a sign of God’s punishment. Her shame was great. Yet, her faith was even greater. As the wife of a priest, Elizabeth certainly would have had a long life of prayer. In fact, just before we are told about Mary’s pregnancy, we are told about Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah and their mystical experience of a divine messenger. This made Elizabeth ready to believe Mary and to validate her vision of God. She saw in the brokenness of Mary the very Spirit of God. It is interesting that the two women are the main speakers in this part of the story while, Zechariah, the priest is kept silent according to Luke 1:20, “But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.” It is those on the margins who are able to know the power of solidarity and listening. They know that one needs others, and that community is essential for survival, while those of us who put our trust in our own power often forget our need for others. Let’s listen to the scripture from Luke 1:39-45

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

We need to be like Elizabeth in the world where we see the divine image and potential in every person we encounter. Being able to see the light, image, and dream of God in each person and helping them to see that can be very challenging. I am sure that Elizabeth had to let go of her cultural judgments and fears in order to help her young cousin.

One of the best definitions of sin I have ever read is that by Meggan Watterson in her book *Mary Magdalene Revealed*. She writes, "Sin in Mary's gospel is not about a long list of moral or religious laws; it's not about wrong action. Sin is simply forgetting the truth and reality of the soul - and then acting from that forgetful state." Helping each other to remember the divine reality of life by reconnecting to our souls and their longing is the good news of the birth of Jesus which we need so desperately in our world and in our lives today.

We are often tempted to believe that when we people see our perfection, they would know God. I used to really like this saying, "Live in such a way that those who know you, but don't know God, will come to know God because they know you!" But as I have gotten older, I am realizing that this saying can become a bit of trap because it implies that people would only see God through us when we are doing good things. Sometimes, the best times to see God in us or in others is when we are utterly scared, broken, and vulnerable, much like Mary was when she ran to her cousin.

In his book *The Kingdom of God is a Party*, Tony Campolo told a powerful story about this ability to see the divine in each other. On one of his trips, he made his way unwittingly to a seedy part of town for a snack at 3:30 am in the morning only to be surrounded by eight or nine prostitutes who had just gotten off work for the night. He overheard one talking to her friend, "Tomorrow is my birthday." Her friend rebutted, "So what do you want from me? You want me to get you a cake and sing, 'Happy Birthday?' The birthday girl protested, "Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to put me down? Why should you give me a birthday party now when I've never had a birthday party in my whole life?" When the prostitutes left, Campolo's heart was touched. He decided to throw her a surprise party. He decorated the place the next night with the help of the bartender, who chipped in for the cake. The next day, the stunned girl was deeply touched when the whole bar sang a birthday song to her. Campolo offered to say a prayer for the woman before the stunned crowd, and after the prayer, the bartender remarked, "Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?" Campolo replied, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning." The bartender then sneered, "No you don't. There's

no church in the world like that. If there was, I would join it.” May we be able to see God in others both in their beauty and in their brokenness, just like Elizabeth did! Amen.