

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year C

RCL

- [Micah 5:2-5a](#)
- [Hebrews 10:5-10](#)
- [Luke 1:39-45, \(46-55\)](#)
- [Canticle 15 \(or 3\)](#)

The opening of this passage known as the Visitation is jarring. And Mary went with haste it begins. This is surely against all we hear in our culture today. Slow down. Pause, take deep, slow, breaths. When the world speeds up, be counter-cultural and move slowly. I can imagine a hurried moment when Mary went with haste. Gabriel had just told her that good news of great joy- that shocking and world-turning-upside-down news- what does she do now? Where does she go? Whom can she see to even begin to process this revolutionary and even dangerous news?

Poet Jan Richardson invites us to ponder about our sense of time. That, sometimes, when we receive a message, it is loud and clear, and we need to act urgently on it. Our hearts sense the Spirit moving within our lives, and the time is now. Move with haste. There's no slowing down what has begun. And then, there are those times in which we need a season of preparation, of moving into a time of secrecy or refuge before embodying and bringing that message to life. Mary, felt both of these calls deeply. She's but a young, unwed girl, with a startling message. She knew something was growing within her, and so with haste she packs up her bags and sets out on harrowing journey alone- traveling upwards of 100 miles to see her cousin, Elizabeth. Not quite the meek and mild

woman the church historic has painted her to be, but a strong, independent, and courageous woman on a mission.

We know though, that this is just the beginning of the story. For, Mary, even in her haste, once she arrives where she needs to be, she does pause, with great intentionality, to heed God's word. Her visit to Elizabeth becoming her a place of solace. It was more than just a desire, but an absolute need to be with someone who could maybe, just possibly, understand what she is going through. Jan Richardson imagines Mary arriving breathless, falling into the welcome and intimate love her family extends to her. While the situation is different, it's reminiscent to me of what's been called the parable of the prodigal son. After the son went on a reckless and dangerous journey, he knew it was time to return to those who loved him. And before he even walked across the property line, his father was there, with a holy embrace of welcome, very much like Mary and Elizabeth embracing after their own long, respective journeys.

Two prophets- greeting one another and embracing the news Mary had to share from God- Elizabeth, prophetically naming what was happening, and Mary, responding prophetically in turn, singing the Magnificat to Elizabeth's proclamation. It's been said that "Singing can be an act of resistance." And so Mary sings God's song, with a steady and confident voice. The foundations of the earth surely must have begun shaking at this very moment. The angel tells Mary she has found favor with God, but musings of *a would-be theologian* thinks, "Finding favor with God, though it sounds like a real treat, was no guarantee of comfort or security, as the scripture notes on a pretty regular basis. Indeed, God's favor seems more likely to get one into trouble than just about

anything else. After all, prophecy – especially when it comes to the question of bringing the people back to God, is almost never well-received.”

How do we receive this news? This is our last Sunday in Advent to prepare our spiritual homes for Jesus’ coming. Time runs short, Christmas Eve is just tomorrow, but there is still time. Time to both dwell in the past and the future, time to live in both memory and hope. Looking back to the birth of Jesus and ahead to the redemption of the world when Christ comes again to bring creation back into the fold of God. Mary knew this. Mary was so sure of God that she sang her song in the past perfect tense. God has shown strength. God has scattered the proud. God has brought down the powerful. Has lifted up the lowly. Has filled the hungry. Has sent the rich away. It’s more complex than speaking simply in the past tense for God has already completed, PERFECTED those things. Mary wasn’t naïve. She lived in a brutal time with powerful and oppressive forces of government and immense poverty and violence. There was healing yet to be had. But, in God’s time, it’s already happened.

While it doesn’t always feel like it, there is always time for this preparatory work. In their powerful sisterhood bond by God’s calling to them, supporting and caring for one another, seeking the best for each, Mary and Elizabeth spent time in this holy space. And while this deep preparing often takes months, even just spending a moment there can renew the hope that God has placed in creation. Have you ever felt like Mary? Needing to draw away into the hidden place? Maybe you need that now, and think your preacher is crazy for suggesting you try it the day before Christmas Eve. In the past, what have you received in that place of solace that could give you strength for the journey when

you can't slip away? Mary went with haste to find this place and God invites you to do the same.

Just like our poet Jan Richardson, I wonder what happened in those three months set aside. In the place where the veil was so thin they could reach out and touch God. She calls this a creative hiding, not one where we isolate ourselves from the world, but one where we stay just connected enough to continue to "allow our hearts the space it needs for whatever season it needs it. Enabling us to listen, breathe, explore, wonder, dream, question, and listen some more." In these final hours of Advent, move with haste to take a moment to pause and do those final preparations, be drawn more deeply into the life of God, and anticipate the light about to come into the world.