

December 20, 2015
Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It seems this time of the year everyone is moving with a heightened sense of urgency. There are so many things to do, places to go, and people to see. I am guilty of this myself and often find I am in such a haste to get things checked off my list that I forget to slow down and listen. But what is it we might be listening for? How might our excitement and hastiness we find ourselves in this time of the year be transformed into an altogether different sense of haste?

I have been reflecting this past week on those first two verses of today's gospel reading, in which Luke tells us, "In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth." (Luke 1:39-40 NRSV) Mary's seemingly sudden and quick departure comes immediately after being visited by the Angel Gabriel in which he announces to her she has found favor with God and will, despite being a virgin, conceive and bear a son whom she is to name Jesus. He will be great among his people and be the son of the Most High. She also learns her cousin Elizabeth, who was barren and now in her old age has become pregnant and will bear a child. As the passage concludes Mary seems to confidently proclaim, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

And then she sets out. With haste. On an 80-mile journey that would have taken many days of excruciating and dangerous travel through desert heat and over mountain ranges. Why? Luke doesn't really tell us what has brought upon the suddenness of her departure, but it left me wondering this over the past week. Why the haste Mary?

It's entirely possible her expeditious trip was one done out of necessity for the safety of her own life and that of the Christ child growing within her womb. Quite possibly, we could deem her a refugee in some sense of the word; while she didn't flee her country of origin, might she have fled for safer surroundings? Could it be the mother of our Lord and Savior was fleeing from the very real possibility of being stoned to death by the powers of the day? Might she have had no other voice standing up for and protecting her? Could the only place she might find hospitable, inviting, and safe shelter come only as a result of her necessity to traverse dangerous roads, dark valleys, and the rugged terrain of the Judean hill country? What might have happened if she didn't respond in a haste?

But, in reading the text I take away there was more to her trip to see Elizabeth. While the text tells us as much and it seems a certainty she experienced fear, uncertainty, and probably anxiety about what all this meant, Luke reveals to us some of that initial fear and uncertainty was transformed by her encounter with this messenger of the Lord into excitement and joy after learning of Elizabeth's pregnancy and the knowledge that God was at work in remaining faithful to God's covenantal people to be with them and bring them yet again into the safe keeping of an ever watchful and compassionate God. It appears her faithful response, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord," flows from the knowledge that God was at work and part of that work involved Mary. This very fact caused Mary to overflow with excitement and joy through song with beautiful words we ourselves sang and heard read earlier called *The Magnificat*, taken from the very first line of the song in which Mary states, "My soul *magnifies* the Lord."

It's as if Luke, in Mary, paints a picture of discipleship; excluding, of course, the part about giving birth to the newborn King and Son of God. (Our Savior has come. There is but one. Thus, I don't see the inclusion of giving birth to the Son of God on the discipleship checklist be there one.) Discipleship that comes not from something Mary has done; but, rather as a result of what God has done. God has come near. God has spoken. God has called. God has invited Mary to be a part of God's plan of salvation from the world. Discipleship that transforms fear and doubt into excitement, joy, energy, opportunity, and the ability to move forward, with haste. As if what God is doing takes precedence over all other things in her life. As if she needs to tell this good news of great joy right now. Not tomorrow. Now! Luke seems to imply a real sense of urgency in making known salvation is at hand in the coming of the Christ child. Mary goes with haste, which if you listen closely tomorrow night will be replicated by the shepherds after their encounter as Luke tells us they, too, went with haste [to Bethlehem] and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in a manger. (2:16)

History and experience shape my knowledge that I often prefer to ponder and chew-on just how God might be using me and using our congregation. In and of itself, this is not a bad thing. There are indeed times in which it is a necessity and probably a more responsible and faithful approach to cautiously move forward (e.g., my call to seminary, the decision to close a congregation, etc.). It has also been my experience congregations find themselves often stuck in the stage of indecision and uncertainty. Maybe even caught amid differences of opinion on what to do next. At times, it seems we even talk until we are blue in the face and instead of swiftly moving forward trusting God is about to do something, we miss an opportunity to be a part of God's work. We lose out on both an experience of being the light of Christ to another

and, also, encountering the presence of Christ coming to us through another. To give caution to the wind and with fleet of foot leap into action and serve the Lord with all our heart, body, and strength.

What if the shepherds didn't move out hastily? What if Mary sat and continued to ponder? When we do the same thing, are we not taking our calling and invitation from God and naming it as simply another item on an already full to do list? How might we miss out on what may be a golden opportunity for the Spirit to grow our faith and encounter the risen Christ? There are moments we simply must move with haste. I bet each of us could rather quickly recollect many times in life when we moved with haste and the result was a grand experience and one that we continue to treasure and talk about to this day. Likewise, I bet we could each conjure up moments of regret in which we didn't act and wonder about an opportunity that may have been missed.

God is continuing to call you. Call us as the church. To work that is vital and urgent to bringing God's love and the good news of great joy to all people. In the coming year, might we pray the Spirit move us beyond our fear and run with haste to experience our own encounter with Christ and our own opportunity to proclaim this great thing that God has done in taking on human flesh that first Christmas. Perhaps, at the top of our New Year's resolutions might be, "Do not waste. Move with haste to respond to God's call to do _____." What is that blank space that needs to be filled in? I can't tell you. Maybe it's an invitation to join the council. Maybe it's a lingering feeling you have had to increase your giving? Maybe it's to advocate for a cause you are passionate about? Maybe it's to visit shut-ins or those in the hospital? Maybe it's to organize a youth activity? Maybe it's to befriend another peer at school

who needs a friend? Maybe you have always felt the pull to join us for Lutheran Day on the Hill and this year you are simply going to move with haste to do it? (February 19, 2019)

Whatever it might be, there comes a time when haste is of the essence. Go says our Lord and I will be with you. Go and do my work. Go with excitement and joy for the grace I have given you. God with the gifts I have equipped you with. Go with haste my faithful people! You can do it. I will be with you! Lord, give us the strength, confidence, and faith to respond with those words of Mary, ““Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.”