

[Opening Slide]

Life Disrupted

Advent! A season of disruption! With the holiday season already in full-swing, Advent bids us to slow down, put the breaks on. To hit pause, yes, to come to a full stop. Where, in the first of our series “Songs of the Savior” we see the “press pause” button engaged in the lives of Elizabeth (and Zechariah), then Mary and Joseph. I mean, talk about a disruption – the “best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men” (“To a Mouse,” Robert Burns). I mean, who would ever choose such a script for their lives? No one knowingly chooses to be disrupted!

Maybe you can relate? To an unexpected shift that brought forth an “all stop!” A not so welcomed word from the doctor, the sudden loss of someone you loved, a major financial set back, one of any number of those sicknesses you can get shots for these days ... or an unexpected pregnancy; which is where God’s Word picks up this Sunday.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:26-28)

It’s a song of salvation that begins with ...

1. [SLIDE # 2] Untimely Happening

Where, you likely know Mary’s story. But what about the other couple in the drama – Zechariah and Elizabeth? Whose settled life was disrupted, as Elizabeth, advanced in years, is now six months into the family. Let’s go back a few verses and see how we got here:

*“In the days of Herod ... there was a priest named Zechariah ... and he had a wife ... (whose) name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments ... But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and **both were advanced in years.**” (Luke 1:5-7)*

Here, Luke describes an older couple beyond child-bearing age. He describes them as “good people” living a life of faith. Yet, though seemingly full, something was missing in their lives. In a culture that placed value on a couple having children, they had none; that they were now elderly signaled they likely never would.

It’s not unlike times in my own life where there were expectations, either ones I had for myself, or ones placed on me by others, where, for all of my effort, I came up short – a football “career” that ended, an Eagle Scout award missed by a few months, friends who wrote my friendship off as if it never existed. Like Zechariah/Elizabeth – both long resigned to a life without diapers and midnight feedings – kids the farthest thing from their minds.

But then, an interruption:

“And there appeared to (Zechariah) an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” (Luke 1:11-13)

Talk about timing! Where in, God's timing is always perfect, even when it seems untimely. Yes, just as Elizabeth conceives a child, we, too, can trust God in the good times as well as the untimely, challenging events of our lives. There will be struggles that may bring us to our knees. Yet we have an enduring promise from the Father:

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

I can imagine Zechariah (the well-schooled priest, who, because of his unbelief, was struck unable to speak by the angel) signing this verse to his beloved as she realizes she *will be* giving birth, the Lord preparing them both, but especially Elizabeth, to now be a voice of encouragement to a young, likely worried, teenage girl who was in the throes of her own life-altering disruption.

Child of God, if you are experiencing an "untimely disruption," this Word from the Lord is for you. Your heavenly Father is *for you*. He is *with you*. Where life's disruptions are but another opportunity for faith to blossom and flourish in the wide-open expanse of His great grace.

Where, in our text, we also rejoice in:

2. [SLIDE # 3] Unexpected Encouragement

Let's pick up Mary's story; where she's just been informed by Gabriel that she will conceive and bear a son – so named Jesus; and also, that her older relative, Elizabeth, is also going to give birth. Luke continues ...

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to ... the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth ... filled with the Holy Spirit ... exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ... For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed ... what was spoken to her from the Lord.'" (Luke 1:39-45)

In the midst of life's disruptions, how precious are the enduring promises of God's Word. Yet, Mary and Elizabeth's joyful exchange points us *also* to the power of community and encouragement in helping us to navigate those times of disruption. I mean, think about it, Elizabeth's *"Blessed are you"* to Mary might have been the first positive words Mary had heard in days or even weeks. Where, in a world of unspoken expectations and outright judgment, the relationship of these women of God reminds us of the strength that comes from supporting and uplifting one another ... a strength that flows directly from God's life-affirming word.

Again, reading from Isaiah's scroll:

"He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:29-31)

Zechariah could well have turned to this passage to encourage Elizabeth, Mary, or both. Where, what is evident is this: community – especially built around the enduring Word of the Lord – matters! That, during this season, as we exchange gifts and share time with our loved ones, we also rejoice to be a source of encouragement in each other's lives, not overlooking the beautiful reality that in our weakness and coming up short, God is our strength.

Yes, young or old, we will run and not grow weary; we will walk and are not faint; as we follow where God leads.
Where, finally, we come face to face with an ...

3. [SLIDE # 4] Unmatched Miracle

In our ever-disrupted lives, we hit pause during this Advent season to embrace the always timely Word of forgiveness and grace that brings life and light to our dark world. Second, we joyfully anticipate and look for opportunities to be that source of unexpected encouragement among those we encounter. Where, in all the trappings that so often cloud this season, we are blessed not to miss the unmatched miracle that unfolded in the lives of those two babies born six but months apart.

One, was a “voice” – John the Baptist – crying in the wilderness (Mark 1:2-3), *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths”* – bidding us daily to pause, repent, sweep the temple clean ... all in preparation for the Other, *“the Word (of God) made flesh”* (John 1:14) – Jesus, the Savior – who *“will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break”* (Isaiah 42:2-3), but one whom John declared:

“Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Yes, the unmatched miracle is this ... Jesus comes, even still, in *“grace and truth.”* (John 1:14, 17) You are loved.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” ... your sin, and mine! Would you know him? Even in the midst of life’s disruptions? Cling to His Word of forgiveness. Take up a place at His Table of grace. Thrill to know the joy of saying “YES” to the One who comes to us even now!

Where, in the 1st of our songs, the voices that sing them are important. Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary ... little could any of them have known what big plans God had in store for them ... or for us, who also sing their song of salvation ... as we are redeemed by the blood of the One to whom they bore testimony ... as we take up faith’s song in full-throated joy!

[SLIDE # 5] Yes, may we rejoice this day, as we thrill to hear His Word ... as we share in community this life of grace we’ve been given ... and as we now herald the love of the Savior borne into the world – borne into our lives.

Of this One, Jesus, the Messiah, St. Paul would encourage ...

“Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

So that as we leave God’s house today, may we do so as *“imitators of God as dearly loved children”* ... covered in HIS fragrant love, bearing His grace, mercy, and peace into the places where we live, move and have our being. It’s the one disruption we need to most ... Jesus, the Messiah, borne into this world; today – borne into our lives.

Amen.

[Friday E-mail:] Advent Joy and Peace. What's that you say? Advent? Already? I can hardly believe it myself ... always coming the same time every year, but yes, also somewhat of an interruption to a holiday season that's been underway since before Halloween. Got that Christmas shopping done yet?

Where, the Biblical scholar Martin Franzmann offers up the following observation:

"If Matthew's Gospel is the most austere and the most compelling of the Gospels, if Mark's is the most vivid and dramatic recital of the deeds of Christ, Luke's is the warmest and most winning story of them all ... It is Luke's Nativity story that has most decisively shaped the church's Christmas celebrations." [Concordia Self-Study Commentary] It is this Gospel that will serve as the backdrop to our Advent/ Christmas sermon series entitled "Songs of the Savior." This week our text is **Luke 1:26-38**.

You might spend a moment reading the entire chapter. I mean, talk about an interruption – to the lives of both Elizabeth and Zechariah, as well as to Mary and Joseph – and to a world that for the most part was basically unaware of what God was about to do. Wherein, *"when the fullness of time had come,"* Paul says in Galatians 4, *"God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* [4:4-5] How disturbing such interruptions can be, unless of course, they are shrouded in the grace, mercy and peace of the Lord's coming ... unless out of the chaos and confusion that interruptions in our lives typically bring, the Lord issues forth a Word, with lasting effect.

Child of God, Jesus' coming has done just that. I know, I know, most of the world in which we live doesn't see it, or have time for it. But *you* do! As the Lord's redeemed sons and daughters *you* are ready to welcome and receive Him *anytime* He chooses to descend. *You* are ready to meet Him in His Word! *You* rejoice – I know you do – in your Baptism! You emphatically thrill to meet Him in His house/ at His Table. Yes, Advent is less an interruption to our lives as an opportunity – an opportunity once again, to meet the Savior who has come, who is – even now – coming into the world, and who most certainly will come again!

So, get those vocal chords ready. They will most certainly get a workout as we rejoice to sing the Lord's praises during this season ... songs once – and still – inspired by what the Lord once said to Mary through the angel Gabriel: *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with **you**!"*

May our blessed Savior remain with you, child of God, throughout this coming season of joy! Where, the joy of the season doesn't come in all the trappings that this world would offer. The joy of the season comes in your saying "yes" to Him when He calls! SYOS