

4th Sunday of Advent: Candle of Love
20th December 2009
Calling Home: Good News and Bad News
Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55
Revs. Ana & Tod Gobledale
Kirkland Congregational Church UCC

Narrator: *Let us listen in on a phone conversation between a young girl and her mother.*

Hi Mom. I am calling from the city. I will explain what I am doing here in a moment. Mom, I have some **good news** and some **bad news**. Mom, I know you and Dad were really looking forward to my wedding with Joe: the ceremony, the celebration, the dancing and festivities. Well... Joe and I have decided not to have a big wedding.

Mom, That **IS** the **good news**...you and Dad will not have to shell out a lot of money to rent a venue and pay for all that food and wine.

What? If that is the Good News, what is the bad news?! Weelll..., a little problem has popped up....okay. I'm just going to say it... I am pregnant. Mo-ommm..., it is not **so** bad. **AND**, I am **not** the first teenager to get in the family way. Mom, Mom, stop saying, "Joe! That dirty old man!" Joseph had nothing to do with it! Honestly, mom, I do not know how this happened! But, I am pregnant. There is a light shining in all this darkness: Joe! sweet, sensitive, amazing Joe. His love for me continues to make me want to weep tears of joy.

Mom, most men, **at best**, would break off the engagement when they found their fiancé pregnant with someone else's child. And at worst... some men would have me stoned! Joe just gathers me in his arms. He holds me in his heart. He promises to take me as his wife, pregnant and all. Joseph is a real saint.

So, what am I doing in the city? Apart from not wanting you and Dad to give me grief over being pregnant? I had an urge to visit Elizabeth. Right, your brother's daughter, my older cousin, Elizabeth.... You are right, mom, cousin Liz has always been very understanding and accepting of me. That is why I am here.

You have met Liz's husband, Zechariah. He is such an odd, little man,...and a priest. Mother, do not get your knickers in a knot over my description of Zechariah. Admit it, he really **IS** odd. **AND**, I have heard **YOU** say to Dad that anyone who marries a priest must have been badly bitten by the love bug and have bid farewell to their better senses. Anyway, today Zechariah seemed **REALLY** odd! When I arrived at Liz's place I received a hearty welcome from her. Zechariah had a big smile for me, too. But then he did not say anything! I thought, "That is odd." So I asked Liz, "What is with him?"

Liz says that Zechariah has not spoken a word since the last time he was burning incense at the altar. Mom, that was weeks ago! All the folks around here say Zechariah saw a vision in the temple, whatever that means? For now, he has been rendered speechless. He will not-- or cannot-- say a word. How odd is that?

But, that is not the big news from my old, cousin Liz. Remember how you always thought she would never have a child? **YES!** She is also expecting! I guess Zechariah being rendered speechless found other things to do! What is that? too bad he did not lose his voice years ago? Mother!

Anyway, what a pair ancient Liz and I make. She, almost forty, and me only fourteen, waddling around the market, shopping. Both of us pregnant.

Mom, here is another strange story. Liz says when I arrived at their house and called out "Hello," before she even saw me, she felt her baby quicken and kick in her womb. Liz broke into a song of blessing for me and my baby-to-be. She said she was not sure what she was singing. But at the

same time, she knew those were *exactly* the right words to say. She says my child will be a fulfillment of God, someone special. You know, I actually believe *all* children are a fulfillment of God, *all* children are special. But that's what she said anyway.

Mom, was it like this for you when you were expecting me?

Pause...

I am over my morning sickness. These days I am filled with energy and euphoria. Yes, I know these are not the best of times. Yes, I know terrible things happen in our country. Yes, I know life will be a challenge for me and my child. Sometimes I think I should be worried or afraid. But when I think about this baby, I can't help it, my heart just sings.

Mom, carrying this new life, *I* feel multiplied. I feel as though I enlarge upon God, or perhaps I see God enlarged, magnified. Mom, I told you how Liz broke into song at my arrival. Weeelll... in response to Liz's song of greeting, a song sprang from my lips. It was too weird, but at the same time it felt natural. I just knew that all the bad things of this world would end, all the brokenness, all the suffering, all the loss, all the injustice, all the pain and sorrow would be swept away by God.

The exact words of my song? Let me see if I can remember... It went like this... *My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my saviour. God has looked with favour on the lowliness of this servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is God's name. God's mercy is for those who revere God from generation to generation. The arm of God has shown God's strength. God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, God has lifted up the lowly. God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped the servants, and in God's mercy, they are remembered.*

I know, mom, I know. The last part of the song *IS* in the past tense, as if these things have already come to pass. They have not, but even in the darkness, I see God's light shine for me, for all of us.

Mom, I know I should feel frightened to be so young and to be pregnant. But, instead, I feel confident, buoyed by love. Mom, I should be rejected by my betrothed, I should be cast out by society because I am unmarried and expecting, but, instead, I am gathered in; gathered in by Joe, even though I am not carrying his child.

Joe embraces me as his beloved, betrothed, wife to be. And I am gathered in and loved by my cousin, Elizabeth, by her extravagant welcome and words of blessing.

Mom, whatever my child turns out to be, she—or he-- will be greatly loved. Cousin Liz talks about this child being a fulfillment of God. What better fulfillment can there be than to love a child? And each one of us *IS* a child, a child of parents, and a child of God. Our destiny, our fate, our very lives, *ALL*, is to know that we are loved and to love others as we are loved. Amazing.

Mom, I know sometimes I am a disappointment to you. I know that things have not always turned out for me the way you would have liked. ...

Really? Mom, that is the nicest thing you could have said. I love you and Dad, too. You are a great mom.

Oh, Mom, I am really craving your chicken soup. Could you please send some? Just kidding! You are the best. Love you, too. Bye.

Narrator: *The candle of love burns even in longest of nights. And the darkness shall not overcome it. Let us pray.*

God, you surprise us. You have a purpose for each of us. Thank you for Mary and her acceptance of her role in this divine drama. Thank you for your abundant love, and all those people in our lives who have shared that love with us. Empower us to overcome the harshness and darkness in our lives and share that love with others. Be with us during this season of anticipation. Amen.

by Kate Huey

After three weeks of sermons from those wilderness prophets, Jesus and John the Baptist, about world-shaking events, part judgment, part exhortation to get our lives turned around in preparation for what is to come, we come upon a very different scene in this week's reading from Luke's Gospel: four unlikely prophets gathered not in the wilderness but on the front step of Elizabeth's home, two of them not yet born. The other two are women, women with names and stories, with voices and something to say, or in Mary's case, something to sing. Women and babies: we're definitely not at "the top of the heap," here, especially not when there's an official priest in the house, Zechariah, a knows-what-he's-doing expert in matters of faith. Ironically, here Zechariah is the one without a voice, literally, since he was struck speechless during his own angelic visit. The stage is set this week, then, for us to have the rare opportunity to hear from the women and children for a change. And what a change they dream of! Mary's song comes from deep within her, perhaps, we would say today, from her DNA. On that doorstep, she sings for Elizabeth and both of their babies, and maybe for the bewildered priest, too. This young girl, inexperienced and sheltered, sings about God's blessings in her life, and of God's vision of a world made right. Perhaps she gets carried away: "She is no longer singing the song; the song is singing her," says Barbara Brown Taylor, "and what music, what verse!" This teenager is "no politician, no revolutionary; she simply wants to sing a happy song, but all of a sudden she has become an articulate radical, an astonished prophet singing about a world in which the last have become first and the first, last."

For further reflection

Simone Weil, 20th century

Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.

Meister Eckart, 14th century

We are all meant to be mothers of God.

Eleanor Roosevelt, 20th century

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

Mother Teresa, 20th century

One filled with joy preaches without preaching.

Cheyenne saying

A people is never defeated until the hearts of the women are on the ground.