

GO ! - MARY TO ELIZABETH  
Advent

Luke 1:39-49, 56

A Sermon Preached by  
**Pastor Catherine Foote**  
University Congregational United Church of Christ  
Seattle, Washington 98125  
December 5, 2017

Scripture – Read by Liturgists

Listen for the word of God.

**Luke 1, 39-49, 56<sup>1</sup>**

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. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for God has looked with favor 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."

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned home.

-----

Pastor Catherine Foote

Will you join me in prayer.

God,  
May the words of my mouth  
And the meditations of our hearts  
Draw us closer to you who are full of grace and truth.  
– Amen

I want to begin this sermon today with a little bit of a looking back. In fact I want to look at a specific moment we've had in our worship service all fall. Because all fall we've been talking about getting ready to go: packing our bags. And every Sunday as we prepare to listen to the sermon, we sang to our children, "Where are you going and can I go with you?"<sup>2</sup> as if we wanted to exit the sanctuary

---

<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New Testament. (adapted) ©1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. .

<sup>2</sup>.From "Oh Where Are You Going" by Graham Maule & John Bell, ©1987, WGRG, Iona Community.

## GO ! - MARY TO ELIZABETH

before the sermon started. And then this morning to make the point more emphatic, we sang, "Children, go where I send thee. How shall I send thee?"<sup>3</sup> Looking back and then rooting ourselves in the present, together we sing.

Our Advent series is about going, whether we are ready or not. Whatever you have put in your bags so far, grab them now because it's time to go.

You know it was almost 11 months ago now that women and men gathered to march together for justice. Not only across this country but around the world last year, women and men heard the call to go, and they went. You know some of those stories of going are amazing. They just grabbed their bags and they went, because it was time for women to march. It was time for all of us to march it was time to go.

And across the water over at a little retreat center – it's called Pilgrim Firs – the women of this church who were there on retreat, we marched, too. We gathered in the lodge. We made our signs. We carried them out to Lake Flora Road. They were signs that called for justice. They were signs that asked for peace. They were signs that reminded us that we are connected to everything on this earth and what we do to the earth we do to ourselves. We knew, didn't we, we knew in our guts that whatever else was happening for us it was time to go. It was time to stand up, because as we looked to the future what we saw was a time of trouble.

Here we are 11 months later. You know those things we were marching about, some of those things we were worried about seems to be happening: the climate accords; healthcare; economic justice; and just this week a new tax measure that seems to take from those among us the most in need and give to those who already have more than enough. I am not saying right now that any particular political party is correct. What I *am* saying is in this Advent season we are called to remember what the life of Jesus is about, and what better voice than a young, unwed mother calling out to all of us: a woman reminding us of where we need to go.

So all of that brings us to this story of Mary who had this moment as the Gospel of Luke says where she realized that the child she was carrying was indeed a gift from God. And however we hold these early stories of Jesus, the reality is for Mary it was not necessarily good news to be pregnant and alone. You know many scholars call Luke "the gospel of the women," because women are featured at the very beginning of that gospel talking about where the world could go and women at the very end of the gospel standing at the cross and then running to the tomb to discover that *love will not be conquered*.

Marcus Borg tells us also that the Gospel of Luke is a story written to the most marginalized. And there right at the beginning, it is the most marginalized in Luke's world to whom the angels come. First to Elizabeth who was barren – without children – to tell her her barrenness had ended to remind each one of us as we labor year after year after year and wonder wonder if our work will ever bear fruit. The Angels are with us. They whisper in our ear, "You ones who are barren in your longing for

---

<sup>3</sup> From "Children, Go Where I Send Thee," a traditional African-American spiritual song,<sup>[1]</sup> as well as a cumulative song. This song is also known as "The Holy Baby" or "Born in Bethlehem." There are many versions of this song, each giving a Biblical meaning to the numbers mentioned." Accessed 1/11/2018 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children,\\_Go\\_Where\\_I\\_Send\\_Thee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children,_Go_Where_I_Send_Thee)

## GO ! - MARY TO ELIZABETH

justice, God has not forgotten you." And Mary finding herself pregnant with the call to go, answers that call – this marginalized woman going to the older generation to make that connection, as well.

We will hear about the folks from the Gospel of Luke who are marginalized, who are on the edge, who think and have been told they have no place in the world as it is, until an angel whispers to them, "You belong to God as well, and God indeed is calling you to go." Children go where I send thee.

So Mary goes to Elizabeth. And it's, it's a great story because it reminds us we don't have to go alone it's one of the things I loved about what was called the women's March it wasn't just women there right and we didn't go alone I mean I know sometimes the most courageous of among us step out alone but but in that stepping out suddenly we will discover we are never alone "I'm going to send you one by one," but the sending one who sends us one by one is standing right there with us until we realize we been sent to by two. We've been sent, all for one. We've been sent together. So this sermon begins with a looking back – "Where you going and can I go with you?" – But it grounds itself in the reality that we are indeed called and we respond, "Here I am Lord. I will go Lord if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart."<sup>4</sup>

I've told you before that in motorcycle school I learned if you want to avoid an accident, don't look at what you want to miss: look where you want to go. Because on a motorcycle, a bicycle, or maybe even walking across the street with your phone in your hands, you will go where you're looking. I've experienced that on my motorcycle as I was trying to avoid hitting the car that turned in front of me – it wasn't today – until I remembered don't look at that car, look to where you want to go. Which brings us finally to the words of Mary. We are going to hear them again. You can read them in Luke 1. Mary is looking to where she's going. She's not looking at what she's fearing. She is not looking at what bad thing might happen she says, "God is with me and God is proclaiming good news" to those on the very edge good news to those who are hungry, good news to those with nothing.

I know we live in hard times I know this is a season of darkness. We are the people who carry the light. We are the people who can look to where we longed to go and keep going that direction no matter what. The stories of the Gospel of Luke are rooted in the past. In the Old Testament, Scripture that reminded the Jewish people that God is indeed with you. And reminded those who were following the way of Jesus, God is with you. But this story at its very beginning points us to the future. God's dream for us: it stirs up our imagination so completely that the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumps in recognition of the baby and Mary's.

What are we to make of that? At least this: the future recognizes the future and knows those futures are entwined. It won't be easy. It will be exceedingly hard, but in the end, when we go where God sends us, we are headed in the direction of love and justice.

"Children go where I send thee."

"I will go with you."

Amen

---

<sup>4</sup> From verse 3 of hymn "Here I Am, Lord" by Daniel L. Schutte, ©1981 OCP Publications.

# GO ! - MARY TO ELIZABETH

UCUCC: CF

Transcribed by Beth Bartholomew from [www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2017/01/11/2018-](http://www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2017/01/11/2018-)