

June 25, 2017
Luke 1:5-25

Pointing to What?

The story of our faith is a story about bearing witness. It's a story about people remembering what they have seen and heard. It's about people pointing to something. To something beyond themselves. Something bigger. Something stronger. Something more truthful and hopeful and graceful than we can imagine. Something more than us. Someone, who finds the lost and fills the empty and loves this world to the very end.

The good news is a story told by people who have seen and heard something extraordinary about someone extraordinary. That's what Luke the gospel writer says. Here, let me tell you, says Luke. Let me tell you about this someone named Jesus. But first, we have to start with the one who shows us how to be witnesses, how to point beyond ourselves.

We have to start with John the Baptist. But we can't even start with him. We have to start with his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Because their story points to the One who finds the lost and fills the empty. Their story is truthful and hopeful and graceful, and points to something bigger, to

someone beyond them who loves this world to the very end. They have a story. We all have a story.

Today we hear the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. And we learn they are righteous before God. They lived blamelessly. They followed every commandment of their Jewish faith. They did not work on the Sabbath. They did not eat pork chops or bacon cheeseburgers. They tithed their income, giving 10% to God. They did not covet anything that belonged to their neighbors, even if it was really cool or really fast or really shiny. They did everything God asked them to do and more. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God.

So why had things gone wrong for them? They were right so why were things wrong? Why didn't they have children? Why didn't they have a family like everyone else in their world? Because in that day and age, that was the most important thing to have, a home filled to the brim with sons and daughters. And unless you had that, you had nothing. Unless you had children to care for and who could care for you in old age. And everyone else in the world had that, it seemed, except Zechariah and Elizabeth. And they were getting on in years. And their house was

empty. And their lives were empty. And they had that terrible word—barren—attached to them.

Zechariah and Elizabeth felt empty and barren. And every day they prayed for that to change. They prayed with all their hearts to have a child. Every morning. Every evening. Every spare second they had. They begged God for this one thing. This one thing they wanted more than anything else. Maybe you know what it's like. Maybe you know what it's like to not have what everyone else has. To not have that one thing that is beyond you, that you desire about all else. What do you pray for every morning? Every night? Every spare second of the day? What is the thing that you would most like God to give you?

Take a moment to write that down in your journal.

In our story, we learn that Zechariah was a priest. And his job every day was to serve the Lord at the temple. And one day, Zechariah was chosen to go into the sanctuary of the Lord, the Holy of Holies, where God's presence, God's glory rested on earth. It was Zechariah's job to light the

incense on that day. And the smoke from the incense would rise into the air creating that fragrant smoke that would be pleasing to the Lord. The priests did this kind of thing every day. Zechariah was just doing his job as a priest, perhaps just going through the motions. As we all go through the motions of our days. Not expecting that God might show up. That God might be present. That God might speak to us. We are just doing our jobs and living our lives, like Zechariah. We don't anticipate God. We aren't mindful of God. Our minds are already full of other things. Other things we have to do. Other tasks. Other worries. All the noise and commotion of the world. The noise of life. But what would happen if, like Zechariah, we were suddenly in the presence of God? What would happen to all those things that normally fill our minds? What would become less important? What would become more important?

In your journal, write about what fills your mind and then write about what you want to be mind-full of.

Do not be afraid, the angel says to Zechariah. Do not be afraid; your prayer has been heard. The desire of your heart, God knows it. And you

will have it. You will have joy. You will have gladness. You will have a child and that child will be great in the sight of the Lord. It is a wonderful announcement. Hurray for Zechariah! This should be exactly what he wants to hear. It's what every mother and father wants to hear. Your mother and father. And their mothers and fathers. That their son or daughter will be great. And do great things. They will be great at sports. Great at music. Great at making friends. Great at impressing the neighbors. Great at getting the best grades. Great at getting into a great university. Great at getting a great job. Great at giving you perfect grandchildren. Great at being a success in life. But that's not what the angel says. He says, the child will be great in the sight of the Lord. In the sight of the Lord, this child will do great things. It's like the angel is giving a gift and then taking it back. Because this child's life will not be a life just for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but for the Lord. His life will not point to himself or to his parents but to God. His life will be great but the world will not always think so. Because he will be great at speaking the truth that the world needs to hear. He will be great at calling attention to injustice and greed. He will be great at proclaiming that our story is not

just our story, it's God's story. And it will mean giving up our own comforts and our popularity. Zechariah and Elizabeth's child would not have an easy life. But it would be a life, great in the eyes of the Lord. Their prayers had been answered. But was it the answer they wanted? Was it the life they wanted? Is it the life we want? A life that isn't just great, but great in the eyes of the Lord? What would that look like for us? For our children?

Write in your journal about what a life great in the eyes of the Lord would be for you.

Zechariah was startled by this news. He doubted. He disbelieved what the angel told him. "How will I know that this is so?", he wondered. So the angel silences. Zechariah will not be able to speak until after the birth of this great child. It sounds like a punishment for Zechariah's lack of faith, but maybe it was a gift. Maybe it was a gift to be silent as this miracle happened. As the unexplainable occurred, he wouldn't be able to

explain anything. Or justify or qualify or modify. Zechariah had to be quiet as he waited for the good thing that God was about to do.

Sometimes we must wait for that good thing that God is about to do.

And maybe we need that gift of silence too. In a world of so much noise and so little clarity, maybe we need time to be silent like Zechariah. To be still. To not talk or explain or shout or argue or come up with a pithy statement or a witty comeback or say things just to say things. There can be silence as we await the incubation and gestation and development of God's divine possibilities. For that thing beyond us that God is doing.

That miracle that hasn't yet happened. That is WHAT we are pointing to. Our hope that this world is not barren. That the forgotten ones have not been forgotten. That God is taking away the disgrace we feel. The burden of our loneliness. That God is at work even now, bearing fruit in our lives. But perhaps we need to wait. And be silent. And make time and space to be hope-full and faith-full. So right now, let us be silent.

Let us quiet our minds. Let us silence the fears and worries. Let us be still and sit in the Presence of God. Let us be surrounded by God's holiness and supported by God's love. Let your life be a mystery for a

moment. The lives of those you love. And the life of this world. Entrust them all to God. So that everything may be great in the eyes of the Lord. Be silent and be mindful of what your life is pointing to; and then if you choose, write that down in your journal.