

“Making Room for Love”

Providence United Methodist Church

Message by DD Adams

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 2015

The gospel lesson for today is taken from the book of Luke, chapter one, verses 39 through 55. I'll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”

Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to

Abraham's descendants forever." This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray. God who makes all things new, bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of your word today. Remove anything that would hinder your words from taking root in our hearts. Move in us to yield to you and allow more love to come into our hearts and lives. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen.

Peace with you! We find ourselves at the 4th Sunday of Advent today to reflect on the warm embrace of what Mary and Elizabeth were feeling. There's really no way of knowing why Mary decided to journey the distance to see Elizabeth. Maybe she needed to confirm the announcement that Gabriel the angel made to her. Maybe she just needed to talk.

Both Elizabeth and Mary over the next few months would be making room for the new love of a child. There was so much to be thankful for, but there would also be suffering. Elizabeth and Mary shared a lot. Both were pregnant with boys—one would be a prophet and the other the Son of God. They were first time mothers, although there was an age difference, and both had visitations from God.

During pregnancy, the love that grows in the mother and father (so to speak) changes them. Their heart becomes softer and more compassionate. They consider the needs of this love that's growing inside them before their own needs.

Any woman who's been pregnant and births a child or adopts is faced with the feeling that she may have assumed more than she can handle. On the first day of the child's arrival suddenly your own life is less of a priority. Everything centers on the child's needs. It's quite a reversal in self-identity.

You lose part of who *you* were as a person. You're different now. The change that takes place is dramatic and overwhelming at times. It's a

transformation and it doesn't end; it continues for the rest of their lives. Our time, our money, the giving of self, and all that we use to be is suddenly different.

What if we could feel the same way about the love of God that's poured into our hearts when we accept Christ? Think about the hours of prayer and time that's given to your child, does the love you have in your heart for God also grow? When we make room for love in our hearts and lives for the Christ child, life doesn't necessarily become easier.

It can feel similar to making room for the love of a child that has come into your life. Professor William Barclay, in his *Daily Study Bible*, said that "Jesus Christ came to not make life easy but to make [people] great."

There's a poignant affect that occurs in our lives when we carry a love for the gospel and communicate it to others; it's a paradox. Just as having children that grow—at times, it's painful because we leave a lot of who we were behind. We have to change our hearts and lives.

The Christian life is about change, and we begin to see that life may become more challenging. We give up on getting our way and spending time the way we want. Our lives aren't our own anymore. We see that life is so much richer with God in it, and it produces a joy that can't be matched. Life is good; it's challenging and different than the life you lived before Christ.

When we strive to love others more completely, our lives don't become necessarily easier. God's love is sacrificial and often leaves self out of its equation. It's what John the Baptist has been saying to us for three weeks, "[Christ] will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn."

God wants to do something with the wheat he brings into the barn—something good! When Christ sifts the wheat he cleans it up and prepares it to be used. We can't be of use to God unless we're cleaned up and equipped for ministry. Our ministry is not to clean up other lives, but our own. Our lens

becomes introspective. God invites us into the body of Christ so we might build up the kingdom. God wants to use us, and as we yield to the changing of our hearts and lives we begin to understand why we're here We're not here for ourselves. We're here for each other.

There's a cost in living the Christian life. When we allow God's love to grow in us, we have to make space. What we want is not nearly as important anymore—for God wants to increase his influence in us—and we have to make space. We feel the squeeze at times and the need to be shaped into the image of God and to be transformed.

What is it that hinders our ability to allow God's love to increase in our lives? We must come to an agreement with God to let go of things that separate us so God's love can flow through us. Love takes no offense as 1 Corinthians 13 states. Our hearts must respond to people with the love God calls agape love—an unconditional love that feels compassion and isn't influenced by someone else's action or words.

We pray for everyone and love everyone. Our own happiness is not as important anymore. Ultimately, we let go of our pursuit for *our* personal agenda. Our interests now lie predominantly for the welfare and benefit of others. We wrestle with the need to trust God more and to be at peace regardless of what's happening around us and in the world.

Trusting God may feel overwhelming at times, but God did the impossible, from a human point of view, when Mary and Elizabeth became pregnant. Mary had never known a man and became pregnant. Elizabeth was old and beyond the age of bearing children, but they both became pregnant to fulfill God's divine purpose.

How is it with you? Will you allow God to do the impossible in you? Will you allow the love of God in you to grow, to make more room for God's love, and so change your heart and life?

Let's pray. Holy God who came down to show us what love is, help us to make room in our hearts for this love that's unconditional—a love that's not dependent on anyone else, but a love that sacrifices to meet the needs of others and never stops giving and forgiving. In Christ's name we pray, believing and expecting to receive. Amen.