

“Knowing and Preparing”

I Thessalonians 5:16-24 Luke 1:46b-55 – Rev. Tesa Hauser
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Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that our hearts and minds may be open to role you have for us in your church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sometimes, I wish the authors of the scriptures gave us a little more detail about certain stories and situations. In this instance, I'm thinking about Mary having to tell Joseph that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. An unusual circumstance that I'm sure Mary may not have initially known what to say or even where to start. Telling Joseph meant she knew the potential for a future with him would be ruined, possibly her reputation. At that point, it meant telling her family what was going on and complicating things even further.

Mary knew what the consequences may be, but she still had to tell Joseph, so I'm assuming she prepared what she was going to say. Luke describes her finding out about getting pregnant and then going to Elizabeth's straight away and staying there for three months. Elizabeth knew she was pregnant from the moment she walked in, and I'm sure helped Mary prepare how she was going to tell Joseph this news.

From the little information we do have from the Gospel of Mathew, Mary tells Joseph, and he thinks it's the worst excuse. I wonder what follow-up questions he asked, trying to make sense of her words. I wonder how many answers or ways

to explain she prepared, knowing he would potentially not believe her. He doesn't want her harmed but also wants to make sure not to violate the law and marry this person who is presumably having a child with another.

Assuming we follow the timeline of Luke and then Matthew, Mary goes to Elizabeth first to find solace and most likely share what is happening with someone she trusts. There is this joy between Elizabeth and Mary, both oddly in the same positions and still completely different. Both were pregnant at unexpected moments, pregnant for the first time, with children who are more than your average person. Elizabeth, older at this point, having waited for the day to be pregnant, and Mary, younger, though most likely expecting to be pregnant soon, but not in this way.

Still, there is joy in knowing what is to come, but not being fully prepared. They may have participated in many births in their community at this point; even Mary, so young, would have experienced the communal care of delivering a baby. Midwives were common during this era, but female family members and close family friends would have been there to support the birthing person and midwife or act as the midwife themselves.

However, as many parents attest, you may know and prepare for the coming child, but you can never be fully prepared. Mary's response to this joyful moment is her own song. Amid the most confusing and hard moments of her life, Mary

points back to God, to the history with and promises of God. The one who is known to be a savior and deliverer. God cares for those who are outcasts, who are poor, who are hungry, who are seen as lowly. To the person birthing criticized instead of supported, to those without shelter or consistent food, to those who have been subdued, seen as unhuman, and treated with violence and disdain - God cares. And God will bring down those who sit on the thrones and high places of pride, greed, and power incorrectly used.

How do we prepare for the coming of Christ who will create such a world? We care for those whom God cares about. With joyful hearts, we make sure that as God's people, promised and given salvation by the one in Mary's womb, we spread the good news that God sees and cares for those who are unseen and forgotten. Sometimes, I fall into the trap of believing that what I say, do, or donate doesn't make any difference. However, we are called to do this work without knowing the results, and even when we don't know where to start, I think Paul provides some help.

Rejoice always. Give thanks. Pray without ceasing. Paul's exhortations are about the here and now, and the not yet, what God has done through Jesus, and what is yet to come. Paul is aware of the troubles that face the church in Thessalonika and has his own potential fate in mind. However, he also knows current circumstances are fleeting but has been done, and what is to come has been

promised; it is in that we rejoice. Constant joy and prayer for the current work of God/Jesus through the Church and what is to come. All three make an appeal for constancy and are reflective of God. If God is consistent, we too, should be consistent. If we know what is yet to come, let us prepare for that day.

Verses 19 through 22 are tools or resources as the church waits for that day to arrive, namely the Holy Spirit. As one commentary I read noted, “In order to face the local hostilities and gain inspiration and guidance, the church needs to avail itself of the resource of the Holy Spirit.” These verses are meant to help the church be self-sufficient if the leadership can't return and help them move forward. They are to question everything, even prophecies, but when they do so, are meant to hold fast to what is good and abstain from evil.

The Greek word for good used here can be described as beautiful as an outward sign of the inward good, noble, honorable character, worthy; good that inspires or motivates. At the heart, what is being done is a worthy cause and inspires us to do more. Sometimes it won't inspire, that's life, but we continue rejoicing, thanking, and praying for what God has promised.

A quick reminder that there are no limits to who can do this, no minimum age requirements, or maximum age limits. There are no special licenses or qualifications needed. We know what needs to be done, so how do we plan and

prepare to do what God has asked us to do? There are no guidelines other than to test what is good, and to abstain from all evil things.

I also challenge us to know our roles, know what God has called us to do, and be, and respond accordingly. Our roles will change, and sometimes we won't want to be in that role, but it's our responsibility to respond and support one another. Prepare accordingly for what God has asked you to do and ask those who are open to what God is doing to help you figure it out if you are unsure. Know and prepare for potential failure; God doesn't ask for perfection, but a willing heart.

Joseph thankfully receives confirmation from God that what Mary is saying is true. Generous of God to make it very clear. Joseph's role is clear as well. He is to marry, care for, and protect Mary in this next stage of her life and to protect this unborn child for the rest of his days. He does that until we no longer hear of him. No writings or thoughts of his are kept, but a willingness to do what God had asked of him. His role presumably allowed Jesus to eventually do his work. Elizabeth had her role as well, to provide the one who would prepare the way for Jesus and support Mary during her most vulnerable state.

What is your role? To provide financially to ministries of the church beyond the 10% tithe? Or support the leadership with encouragement? To be a community leader and help the next generation figure out who they are and how their gifts can support the work of the church. Someone who writes letters to or calls government

officials to make sure people are being treated fairly in a system made to set people up to fail. Are you the person praying on behalf of our community and the one around the world? Once you know, prepare for how to live out your role faithfully. There are people who will help you come into this new season or role. It's not easy, and we don't know everything that will lie ahead in our new role, but we are to respond with rejoicing, thanksgiving, and preparing. Alleluia and amen.