

"NO FOOL LIKE AN OLD FOOL"

LUKE 1: 5-21 COTTONPATCH VERSION

Well friends... it's that time of year again. The turkey leftovers are in the fridge, the pie pans are mostly empty except for that one slice of pecan pie somebody keeps pretending they're "saving for later," and we're all slowly wakin' up from our Thanksgiving food comas just in time to realize—ready or not—Christmas is peeking around the corner.

And here we are in church, guitars tuned, voices warmed up, leaning back a little in our chairs, taking a deeper breath than usual. Folk Sunday. A little down-home, a little front-porch, a little "pull up a rocking chair and stay awhile."

Seems to me... this is exactly the right kind of Sunday to meet Zechariah.

Because Zechariah is living between two seasons.

He's between Thanksgiving and Christmas... only his "Thanksgiving" was about 40 years ago, and his "Christmas" is taking a whole lot longer to get here than he expected.

A LONG SEASON OF WAITING

Luke tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth were good people. Faithful. Righteous. They weren't the loud, impressive sort—no TikTok prophets, no "look-at-me" spirituality. Just steady, quiet souls doing the right thing for a long time. A lot like a lot folks here at First Pres.

The kind of folks who bring the casserole when you're sick and show up early to unlock the church doors.

But Scripture says:

"They had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years."

Now... that's Bible talk for, "This ship has sailed."

Bless their hearts, they'd prayed every prayer, lit every candle, whispered every hope... until there weren't any words left. And they figured God had given them a "no." Or at least a holy silence.

Some of us know that silence. I know a lot of you do.

Some of you have lived with prayers that seemed to go unanswered, dreams that didn't quite make it off the ground. Some of you are carrying things that nobody else sees.

Zechariah knows your language. But so does The Lord.

GOD SHOWS UP...

Now, something you should understand that I'd like you to see: Zechariah and Elizabeth weren't run-of-the-mill folks in Jerusalem. They were hoity-toity higher-ups—lived in the best part of the city—and that year, Zechariah won the lottery

to be *THE* High Priest with the duty of entering the Holy of Holies, which—though holy—required annual maintenance. That's the *top* position in all of Judaism. Zechariah wasn't just another Levite; he was Man of the Year in Jerusalem—cover of TIME magazine and all that.

So there he is—an old priest and finally Man of the Year—just doing his job, lighting incense in the Holy of Holies—when suddenly an angel appears.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I were the Lord and decided to send an angel to an old man, I think I'd make that angel look perhaps a little less... *terrifying*. Maybe something gentle—like a cherub—one of those floating little fat babies you've seen in paintings by Titian, or at least someone who doesn't have to start by saying, "DON'T HAVE A HEART ATTACK! DON'T BE AFRAID."

But angels tend to show up in a way that shakes you awake.

So Gabriel tells Zechariah, "Your prayer has been answered. You and Elizabeth are gonna have a baby boy." And then Gabriel launches into this whole beautiful promise about how this baby is going to bring joy, prepare the way of the Lord, and draw people back to God.

Now this is where I picture Zechariah standing there, robe still smelling like incense, blinking his old, wrinkled eyes in disbelief at Gabriel and thinking: "What... now?"

When he finally speaks, he—the highest and holiest of all Israel—puts his foot

straight into his mouth: He says, "Yeah, I dunno. . .How can I be *sure*?" In other words, "I never imagined that if I met an angel it would start by pulling my leg!"

Gabriel doesn't seem very happy with Zack and reads him his resumé, with gritted angel teeth, if that's possible:

"I. AM. GABRIEL! I stand in the presence of God!" And Gabriel strikes him dumb.

I begin to understand from this story why someone who loses his voice is called *dumb*, not because of being mute, but because of Zechariah being so thick. How thick? About as thick as a whale omelet.

A FUNNY KIND OF MERCY

The Bible says Zechariah becomes mute and can't say a word.

And I've always wondered if Elizabeth said to him,

"Well, Zack... if the angel had come to *me* first, I'd have told you to hold your tongue."

God just got there quicker.

But really... losing his voice was a mercy.

Because sometimes God gives us silence—not as a punishment, but as a space.

A space to breathe.

A space to listen.

A space to let our hearts catch up to the work of god—

To the wild grace of God.

Zechariah spent nine months in a holy quiet.

Nine months learning how to wait again.

Nine months discovering that gratitude can grow even in the dark.

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS

Now I said earlier—this Sunday sits between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It's a kind of bridge.

Thanksgiving reminds us of what God has done.

Christmas reminds us of what God is doing and will do.

And Advent?

Advent is learning to live in between.

Between what was and what will be.

Between the promise and the fulfillment.

Between the whispered prayer and the answered one.

Zechariah stands right in that space.

And so do we.

Maybe that's why this story fits so well with folk music today. Folk songs know all about the in-between places. They're full of longing and laughter, heartbreak and hope, the ache of waiting and the joy when mercy finally shows up.

Folk music is porch music.

Heart music.

Zechariah music.

THE GOD WHO REMEMBERS

Do you know what "Zechariah" means?

It means: "The Lord remembers."

And what about "Elizabeth"? "The promise of God."

And what's the name they'll give their son?

John.

Which means: "God is gracious."

Put their names all together, and it tells the story:

The Lord remembers His promise, and God is gracious.

Friends, that's the whole Gospel wrapped up right there.

No wonder this story is the doorway into Christmas.

A WORD FOR US TODAY

So let me preach this softly, the way you'd say it sitting on the porch swing:

God has not forgotten you.

Not your prayers.

Not your tears.

Not your longings.

Not the places that still feel unfinished.

You may be in a waiting season.

You might be living between what you
hoped for and what you've got.

But God is working in the quiet.

And mercy is already on the way.

Thanksgiving told us that God has been
good.

And Advent tells us that God isn't done
being good.

BLESSING

My friends...

May you find peace in the waiting.

May your heart stay open in the long
quiet.

May you discover—like Zechariah—that
God remembers His promises, even when
we grow tired of holding onto them.

And may this Advent bring you the deep-
down, soul-settling joy of knowing:

Christ is coming.

Grace is near.

And the Lord remembers.

