



When You Need Glasses
Sermon on Luke 1:5-25
Pastor Julie McCain, 12/6/15

Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord, in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.

This time of the year can be so magical.

- People seem to be a bit kinder and they have a spring in their step, Christmas lights twinkle and light up the night sky, and Christmas carols ring in our ears and in our hearts.
- But of course you and I know that the true magic of Christmas comes from and is found at the manger.

→But when Zechariah was packing up his suitcase to head off to the temple, he had no inkling about any of that.

As his wife Elizabeth filled his arms with all the things he had forgotten— Perhaps a sandwich for the road, a jacket for when it gets cold—and as she waved him goodbye, she too was entirely ignorant of the roll she would play in ushering in the Savior of the world.

- Sure, they both believed that the Messiah would one day come, but it was a prophecy that had been around for a long time.
- No one actually expected it to come true in their lifetime, let alone for God to use THEM to make it happen.

Even when the angel does appear a reveal his plan to Zechariah, he's hard-pressed to believe it. **And we are apt to think this way, too.**

Often we believe that God can do big things, but we imagine that God would use someone else.

- But as Zechariah learns, that's not the way it works.
- God can use absolutely anyone he wants to accomplish his purposes—people who think they're too old to be useful and those who think they're too young to matter.

A verse from Jeremiah 29 reinforces this idea. It reads: for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for your welfare and not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope.

→And I think I'd add that his plan and his purpose for each of us is also intended to give the world a future and a hope.

So Zechariah's plan was to spend two weeks at the temple fulfilling his duties. It was the day when he drew short straw from among all the other priests.

Drawing the short straw gave him the once-in-a-lifetime chance to go into the Holy of Holies—the inner area where they believed God dwelled in his fullness, and a place where even a priest could not enter unless he had been specifically chosen.

Zechariah's excitement must have been palpable, but we can imagine that his fear might have been palpable as well—because suddenly Zechariah had the huge responsibility of meeting God face-to-face

And it's not long before Zechariah is handed even more responsibility.

An angel tells him that not only that he will have a child in his old age, but also that that child will be incredibly significant.

But Zechariah isn't so sure about the purpose that the angel has placed on his life, and so in response, Zechariah has a simple question:

How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.

→And Gabriel's response is to strike Zechariah mute.

Now generations of people have taken this text to be a warning:

- Don't doubt God, or else.
- Don't be like Zechariah. Have more faith.

But I've never thought that is like that—out to punish us for our struggles, even and especially in matters of faith.

So what I did is I turned the page in the Bible to the story of the angel visiting Mary to tell her she will have a child, and what I found is that Mary's response to her angelic proclamation is almost exactly the same as Zechariah's:

- How can this be, since I am a virgin? She asks.
- To her the promise seems as impossible as it did to Zechariah.

And we can't blame either of them for having such a response.

- Maybe if they'd seen a 60 page manual or proposal with all the details for HOW on earth God was going to accomplish all this
- But they don't have a manual of any sort or any time at all to process what's going on and so what comes out of their mouths is simply the reflex response of two scared and confused people.

But the real thing to note is that Mary is not punished for her doubt; in fact, the angel keeps right on talking and doesn't even seem to notice that she doubts the credibility of his claim.

And that is why I don't think that Zechariah's silence is a punishment.

Instead, I wonder if it might even be a gift.

- The gift of time to process what's going on. The gift of space to contemplate all that God has done.
- I know there have been plenty of times in my life when silence would have been a gift.

And you'll notice that Elizabeth needs some space to figure things out, too: she spends 5 months in seclusion, before she's able to come out and celebrate.

The reality is that:

- No matter how much faith we have, it takes us time to digest a change in plans.
- No matter how faithful we are, it takes time to understand our place in God's plan.

→So if you are struggling or doubting, take a deep breath and give yourself a break. God already knows. God loves you. And God is with you.

After all, part of being human is that we are inherently short-sighted.

Now you can all tell by the fact that I'm wearing glasses that I don't have good vision.

- In fact, I need my glasses in order to function, and I started needing them in 6th grade. But I didn't get glasses until my freshman year of high school.
- In the interim I always needed a little extra help from my friends; I had to borrow their notes in class because I couldn't read the board and they had to practically lead me by the hand on field trips.
- I remember the first day of high school because I knew I wouldn't be able to read any of the signs, and I was afraid that I'd never find my classes. But a friend took me by the arm and showed me exactly where to go.
- Now as a 6th grader I didn't think to ask for glasses and I thought it was all normal, but in hindsight I'm sure the friends who helped me knew that I couldn't see and went out of their way to help for precisely that reason!

And so it is with God, who goes out of his way to help us, especially when we struggle.

When our eyes aren't working right and we don't know where to go, God is with us to be the friend who grabs our arm and leads the way.

For even when we can't see the road ahead, God can.

And that means that we always have a future and a hope. Amen.