

Luke 1:39-55

Have there been times in your life when a reversal grabbed your attention or captured your heart, and left you wondering, “What is going on here and how did this happen?”

I can easily imagine that’s what it was like for Mary and Elizabeth in today’s gospel. It’s happened in my life and I’ll bet it’s happened in yours too.

It might have been something you had long hoped and waited for. It might have been the last thing you ever wanted. Or it might have been something that took you completely by surprise.

Think about those times in your life when:

- your life took a u-turn;

- despite your best efforts and intentions, you didn't get what you wanted, expected, or thought you deserved;
- the situation you thought was hopeless, a lost cause, actually worked out;
- tragedy opened your life to a gift you never could have imagined;

Those are the kind of reversals I am thinking about. And we've all experienced them. They're a part of every life.

Most of us, I suspect, tend to judge and label them as good or bad depending on whether we experience them for better or worse. More and more, however, I am coming to realize that the only thing I really

know about the reversals in my life is that I really don't know.

I can tell you this though. They upset my apple cart and remind me that I am not as knowing, as much in charge, or as powerful as I might think I am. But neither am I as stuck as I sometimes feel. Reversals are life doing what life does; growing, moving, changing. Like it or not, you and I are a part of that.

I don't see reversals as a means or system of rewards and punishments. Sometimes they keep me from living a one-sided life – formulaic, stuck, or closed to the possibility of the impossible. They reveal the complexities, ambiguities, and fragilities of my life and this world. They wake me up and invite me to be self-reflective and dig for deeper insights. They teach me that life is not in service to

me but that I am to be in service to life. They cause me to hold faith, hope, and love just a bit more.

Today's gospel (Luke 1:39-55) is filled with reversals.

- Look at Mary. One day she is a young virgin, the next day she is a pregnant mother to be.
- Look at Elizabeth. One day she is old and barren, the next day she is a pregnant mother to be.
- Mary says she is a lowly servant who "from now on all generations will call ... blessed."
- She proclaims that God scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry, and sent the rich away empty.

Do you see the reversals? It's one after another. So here's what I wonder. What if reversals are the way of God? Isn't that what we see throughout the scriptures?

- Remember what Joseph's brothers did to him? They plotted to kill him, stripped him of his robe, and threw him in a pit to die. Then they pulled him out and sold him to some merchants for twenty pieces of silver. (Genesis 37:12-28) Joseph, however, saw the reversal, telling his brothers, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20).
- The prodigal son leaves home with wealth and ends up working in the pig pens. But it was in the pig pens when "he came to

himself” and went home. His father sees the reversals saying, “He was dead and has come to life, he was lost and has been found.”

(Luke 15:11-32)

- In Luke’s version of the beatitudes the poor are given the kingdom of God, the hungry will be filled, the weeping will laugh, the rich will get nothing more, the filled will be hungry, and the laughing will mourn and weep (Luke 6:20-25).
- Simeon tells Mary, the one whom all generations will call blessed, “A sword will pierce your own soul” (Luke 2:35).
- And then there’s the great reversal of Christmas in which the divine becomes human and humans divine.

Scripture is filled with reversals just like our life is. I don't understand and can't explain how any of that happens. I've seen it happening to others and I've experienced it in my own life. But I have no answers. I don't get it.

What strikes me, however, is that neither Mary nor Elizabeth spend time trying to understand or make sense of what is happening. They don't rationalize it or evaluate whether it's good or bad. They don't make too much of it or too little of. Instead, they receive their reversals as an unfolding of something larger than themselves, of which they are a part.

I wonder if that's what Elizabeth is getting at when she says, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment."

Blessed is she who believed that there would be an opening, an unfolding, an enlarging of life. Blessed is that one.

Blessed, however, doesn't necessarily mean life is easy, we get our way, or we live happily ever after. That's also true about reversals as well. Look at Mary. She is the one on whom God has looked on with favour. She is the one whom all generations call blessed. And she is also the one whose soul is pieced by a sword. Maybe blessings are sometimes a mixed bag.

Maybe to be blessed means that we are awake to and trustful of this unfolding of life that we can't explain, control, or understand. Maybe to be blessed means that we are willing to entrust ourselves to, become a part of, and hold nothing back from, that

larger unfolding of life even when it makes no sense, even when we don't know where it will take us.

And if that's what it means to be blessed, how might it change the way we see and receive the reversals of life? What if we could look at our reversals and instead of saying, "This is good" or "That is bad," we entrusted ourselves to the unfolding of something larger than the individual circumstances of our lives. Isn't that what Mary and Elizabeth did?

What are the reversals that have happened in your life? What reversals are happening in your life today? What reversals need to happen? And what if every reversal is pregnant with life? It was for Mary and Elizabeth. Why wouldn't it be for you and me too?

Let us pray,

Like Mary, may we glorify you and rejoice in you our God and Saviour. For you have done great things for us and you are Holy and mighty. May we trust in your plans for us and lean into your love and promises this Advent and Christmas.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.