

SERMON: Ven. Susanna Pain
ADVENT 4 – 18 December 2011
READING: Luke 1:26-28

Sitting with the gospel reading this week, the words that stood out for me this time were:

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month of her who was said to be barren. For nothing is impossible with God.

Then, Mary said in essence ‘Let me become what you have called me to be.’

Noel Davis writes

**In giving birth in time
our love expressed
Else we die
A stranger to ourselves.**

I want to reflect on this reading today by taking you on a tour of images – like the San Marco Annunciation by Fra Angelico at the top of the stairs in a cloister in Florence reflecting the morning light shining on Mary.

My massage room is like a sanctuary, as those of you have had a massage would know. It is a womb space where people can rest, unwind, heal, grow.

On one wall is a sketch of hands holding a tiny baby. On the bookshelf there are several icons. An icon of Mary Magdalene, clothed in red, holding an egg, and pointing to this symbol of resurrection and new life. Beside this, is an icon of a Madonna and child.

There is also a postcard of that Ron Mueck sculpture of a pregnant woman, naked, her tiredness tangible and life about to break out.

And finally, a painting of the Visitation by Michael Galovic – Mary and Elizabeth embracing, cheeks touching. The older woman is past her prime, and the girl just coming into womanhood, both pregnant “for nothing is impossible with God”.

All these images inspire me, and create space, a pause, to ponder ‘God with me’. They all speak to me of this season of waiting and holding, and particularly, of God who is love, promise, potential, companion, within, between, beyond.

Let’s sit with them and go a little deeper and see how they resound with you.

Show images on the screen

To begin, Mary Magdalene, companion of Jesus, first witness of the resurrection, apostle to the apostles – is pointing to the God presence in her life, mature earthy woman, she inspires me to be myself and to walk alongside, imaging the divine.

Second, the pregnant woman, larger than life, real, feet planted firmly on the earth, hot, tired - ready, more than ready, to give birth – just these last days of heaviness, of waiting .. for she has said YES! and nothing is impossible with God. She is present, pregnant, waiting.

Third, there is Mary and her baby. Mary ‘pondering these things in her heart’. In her tiredness, when he sleeps, glimpsing the wonder of it all – the presence.

Then fourth there is the painting of the Visitation. Mary and Elizabeth – joined in their surprise, in their Yes! In their pregnancies – colleagues, peers, embracing. An image of the more, of holding each other sharing – what will be born ?

Many things unfold – the tenderness, the openness, the blessing of friendship – two people embracing, two people ripe with possibility, birthing the word, the message.

Mary responds to God saying, ‘Let me become what you have called to me to be’ (Seasons of the Spirit p.70). *She says this, after she had heard of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. She, Mary, is not alone in this.*

Perhaps it was the expectation of seeing Elizabeth that served as a reminder that Mary was not alone. It could have been her life experience that allowed her to believe that God would be with her. What seemed to be impossible appeared began to appear possible. God’s covenant with the House of David would continue in her and in the child she will bear. This covenant was a promise from God that David would have a physical line of descent that would last forever.

And the final image, two hands holding a tiny babe, as we too are held in the hands of love. (*Seasons of the Spirit*)

Be aware of these for when this time of year is difficult for whatever reason, may these five images grounded in scripture, create a womb space for you -

to rest, to unwind, to heal and to grow

into the meaning of Christmas – God with us, who is love!

‘Expressing the Spiritual’, by Noel Davis:

Giving birth
to the Infinite
to the immensity of the Real
to our mother
our story
Through such a narrow passage
as words, art photography, music, dance, play
the garden, the work fields of the everyday
A moment to follow.
In giving birth in time
our love expressed
Else we die
A stranger to ourselves.

*God of our lives, you are always calling us to follow you into the future,
Inviting us to new ventures, new challenges, new ways to care, new images to
to touch the hearts of all.*

When we are fearful of the unknown give us courage.

when we worry that we are not up to the task

remind us that you would not call us if you did not believe in us.

*When we get tired, or feel disappointed with the way things are going, remind us
that you can bring change and hope out of the most difficult situations. Amen*

Sue Dunbar in the Quiet Day she led earlier in December asks:

What are you doing with the life God is giving you?

What is being brought to birth within you?

What are you waiting for?

And I add: Can this tiny spark set the world on fire?