

Denice K. Leslie
December 17, 2006
Third Sunday of Advent-Rejoice Sunday
Micah 5: 2 0 5a
Luke 1:39-45

“Leap for Joy!”

Bonnie D. Harr, a clinical nurse specialist shares a late December shopping experience. She begins, “It was one of those crisp nights with huge snowflakes falling all about.”

Huge snow flakes. Boy, do I remember huge snow flakes. When we lived in North Indiana, I remember taking our small children into the town of La Porte, about 20 miles north of us, to visit Santa Claus at one of the United Methodist Churches in town. As we approached town, it began to snow. There was already an immense amount of snow on the ground—all dry and lovely, fluffy white snow because it was sooo cold. Below zero.

The street the church was on looked like a photographic Christmas card: huge towering Deadora pines, older two story homes, the church of tan stone picture-perfect while big, lake-effect snow flakes gently floated down.

Even though it was late morning, there was a peace filled silence—no noise anywhere. It was as if the snow had muffled all the world’s disruption, just blanketed it out. We stood in awe for several minutes watching the snow fall before we made our way up and into the bustling church.

But back to Bonnie’s story; she shares, “My family and I stopped at the store for a few ‘extra items’ for our holiday table. We had plenty but wanted more! Being blustery as it was, my spouse had dropped me off at the front door of the grocery store while he went to park our car, and my son jumped out to help me on the icy path.

It was then I heard it—a voice penetrating the silver white skies, singing, ‘*Gloria in excelsis*

Deo’. It was the sweetest voice I’d ever heard! For one moment, I imagined the skies filled with the angelic host of heaven singing the familiar carol, “Angels We Have Heard on High.” I made my way toward the sound in spite of my son’s nudging me to ‘come on, Mom, its cold out here!’

There she was huddled in the corner where an entry wall of the building joined at right angles. She was ragged and feeble, covered in dirt and clothed in barely enough to keep her warm in summer, much less in this unrelenting cold. She smiled at me, though her song never stopped, and her sparkling yes invited me to join the joy as she kept on singing!

I had worn my favorite pastel-blue, woolen coat with its matching mittens and scarf. It seemed the right thing to offer them to her, so I assisted her to her feet and covered her with the garments already warmed from my own body heat. My son was coming out of his ski jacket equally fast, taking off his hat and gloves—for me.

By this time, my spouse came upon us, stopped short by the woman’s magnificent singing. Glimpsing us, and seeing our son in only his sweater, my spouse took his coat off and draped it over our son’s shoulders, and urged us all into the store, saying, ‘Let’s get her something warm to eat and drink.’

We were a motley crew entering. Nothing fit anyone as far as coats go, but perfect love befit the situation. The woman only stopped her singing long enough to select her soup. Once we knew she was warm and fed, we made calls to find her a place in an overnight women’s shelter.”¹ Magnificent singing—singing Glory to God in the Highest! Today we joined together in Mary’s song of joy. We call it The Magnificat--Magnificent Singing of Glory to God:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from

¹ Alive Now, Nov., Dec.2006 p. 30

now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who revere him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away.....”

We associate the color blue with Mary, don't we? I know my manger scene has Mary wearing a blue cloak: the color of innocence and joy—the color in my mind of December. The color of the sky. We think of Jesus coming to us out of the heavens where scripture tells us the angels sang: *“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!”*

On earth we have this dirty, poorly glad, ragged woman hugging the corner of a building singing about the glory of God as snow blows and the thermometer measures below zero. Singing magnificently until her Spirit appointed Elizabeth arrives to clad her in her own blue woolen coat, take her in and provide her with food and shelter.

Isn't that what Mary's cousin Elizabeth did? Mary, a mere girl, runs to her cousin Elizabeth—not out of fear, but out of an eagerness to share what God has done. Elizabeth, on hearing the sound of her greeting, says, “the child in my womb leaped for joy!” And then Mary goes on to sing this song of joy and faithfulness for the wonder of God's salvation at work in her life.

Bonnie, the nurse with the pastel blue woolen coat, found herself responding with awe and wonder at the gorgeous sound of this homeless street Mary's singing—drawn to her joy, she helps her to her feet and clothes her and feeds her.

In mid November I was leaving Denny's following the Wow! Potluck's dinner-out night. The wind was up and it was cold; I found myself

commenting on that to a young man sitting on the bench outside the restaurant. He agreed and then asked me if I could give him some money for dinner.

I looked him over—nice clothes, a good coat, but so young—maybe in his mid twenties. I said I'd given what I'd had to the waitress. He thanked me and I rushed on to my car, rationalizing I had to get choir practice. But I felt a huge twinge inside. I have a son who is 24. Why was this young man down on his luck. What was his story. Where was his family?

The voice of a mother's heart broken cry on the phone rushed through my memory. “What if he ends up on the road somewhere, my son, my son! What if he ends up homeless!” Heart searing cries of a mother waiting for her child. Who hears? Do we??

Whatever the circumstances of the young man at Denny's I was too busy, too insulated in my well-off life to take time to find out. And yet, I tell myself and all of you these are the people we want to reach out to.

Are we so captive to our own circumstance that we can't pause long enough to find out why God is so rudely interrupting us? What kind of life style change would it take for us to have the time to be God's people? How many common sense rationalizations in today's unpredictable world can we use to keep us from getting involved? Not just in each other's lives but in the lives of those in need beyond our doors?

One of the Congregational Brainstorm responses that got left out of the *Good News* this month was a plea for us to do something for the homeless in Clovis. I am going to call the author and see if I she would like to gather some like minded folk and do more than hear her pastor talk about it from the pulpit. If you are among the like minded, please speak to me after service and I'll make note.

The night we were trimming the tree here in the sanctuary, a couple showed up I'd not

seen before. The young man helped with the ladder as Laura was trying to reach some of the top branches with decorations. The Korean Praise band was setting up and I had come in after my Disciple Bible class. I introduced myself and, and anxious about the time, I got busy with the decorating.

Then I noticed the woman sitting in the back of the sanctuary and I realized these folks had come in out of the cold. I took them aside where it was private. After some conversation, in which I found out they were sleeping in a roll of carpeting over in the new construction at the Sierra Vista Mall I got them some food bags filled with items the homeless can use easily, (thank you Joan and Bob Bowser!), and seeing that they were wearing only in sweatshirts, we went over to the thrift shop in search of a blanket, jackets and some long undies.

I left them with a list of referrals and they asked if they could remain inside until after the last evening service. It was already beginning to rain, and as I left them out here in the lobby I paused, and turned and said, “Now don’t tell anyone around here I told you this, but if you need someplace with a roof over your heads you can sleep in the alcove on the north side of the church, the community officer parks in the parking lot out back of the social hall late at night so if you sleep in the north alcove you won’t be seen but you’ll also be pretty safe knowing the officer is here....”

As they thanked me I felt another stab of in my heart. Why should I be concerned that they repeat that information here at a CHURCH. A place that claims to follow Jesus? Yes, again, I know because I too have dispensed all the common sense reasonsand called the police, who as we’ve discovered do try to help the homeless not just take them to the edge of town. But what about all of us who follow Jesus?

I don’t think God is interested in our common sense. Why would God choose a nobody, mere teen to bear Jesus? Why would God be born in an animal stable in the dead of

winter? Why would Mary be off her noggin enough to believe the whole story? And not be afraid? Why would she be singing about it??

Like the lady on the street singing “Gloria?” Maybe our common sense isn’t God’s. Because God’s common sense is about the common. God’s interest is in the shipwrecked of life.

“The shipwrecked at the stable are the poor in spirit who feel lost in the cosmos, adrift on an open sea, clinging with a life-and-death desperation to the one solitary plank. Finally, they are washed ashore and make their way to the stable, stripped of the old spirit of possessiveness in regard to anything.

The shipwrecked find it not only tacky but also utterly absurd to be caught up either in tinsel trees or in religious experiences---‘Doesn’t going to church on Christmas make you feel good!’

They are not concerned with their own emotional security or any of the trinkets of creation. They have been saved, rescued, delivered from the waters of death, set free for anew shot at life.

At the stable, in a blinding moment of truth, they make the stunning discovery that Jesus is the plank of salvation they have been clinging to without knowing it.

All the time they were battered by wind and rain, buffeted by raging sea, they were being held, even when they didn’t know who was holding them.

Their exposure to spiritual, emotional, and physical deprivation has weaned them from themselves and made them re-examine all they once thought important.

The shipwrecked come to the stable seeking not to possess, but to be possessed, wanting not peace or a religious high, but Jesus.

The shipwrecked don't seek peace because they aren't disturbed by the lack of it. By that I mean the subjective feeling of peace. Circumstances can play havoc with our emotions, the day can be stormy or fair and our feelings fluctuate accordingly; but if we are in Christ, we are in peace and there unflustered even when we feel no peace...When we accept the truth about ourselves—shipwrecked and saved—our lives are henceforth anchored in the rock who is Christ, not in the shifting sands of our fickle feelings.”²

Last week at our Horizon Vision team meeting I was going on about our need for brochures to advertise our ministry here. And Sharon Hutchinson said, “No, a bunch of paper isn't all we need. We need a way to engage our community—our neighborhoods—“and as she talked I realized what she was saying: people are blanket with a snow of advertising pieces in the mail everyday.

What people really need is an opportunity to be apart of God making a difference in their lives and in the lives of others. I propose we engage our neighbors and our community in this issue about homelessness. We can do it. All it takes is a few fools for Christ—as foolish and faithful and joy filled as Mary.

This Christmas may our leaps for joy be the knowledge that what's under the Christmas tree is the pricelessness of abundant life made possible through our faith and our actions.

² Brennan Manning, Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus, Baker Book House, 1986.