

“The Miracle Season: Mentors”
Luke 1:39-45

We live in a culture that often lifts up the myth of self-made people. Think about this saying: Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. What does it tell us about success in life? It makes us think that if we worked hard enough, we can make it on our own. While hard work is a good thing, the idea that we can be independently successful without others is an illusion. I love what Arnold Schwarzenegger had to say at a graduation:

<https://youtu.be/eMTbXb1T-ic>.

None of us can make it on our own in life. We need others and others need us. That is how God designed the world and that is what helps us find fulfillment in life. It is not different in the spiritual life. We need people to walk alongside us on this journey of life; people who can challenge, support, and guide us along the way. Miracles don't happen in a void. God usually uses people to help open our eyes to the sacred around and in us.

Our Bible story for today is all about the power of having people walk this journey of life with us. When Mary gets the news of her pregnancy, the Gospel of Luke tells us that she goes to visit her relative/cousin Elizabeth for three months. This would have been a long journey of about 80 miles. One would not take that kind of journey lightly. Mary spends the first three months of her pregnancy with Elizabeth. We know that the first three months are the most critical in any pregnancy. (Read Luke 1:39-45) Without the support of Elizabeth, Mary could not have made it through this challenge in her life. Her ability to carry out the mission of her life depended on Elizabeth's support and mentoring of her. Elizabeth was the best mentor Mary could have had. Here are a few things that are worth noting about Elizabeth's role as a mentor.

First, she was older. Age is not always an indicator of spiritual maturity, but most of the time, people who are spiritually mature tend to be older because they had lived through many experiences of faith and life and learned from them. As the wife of a priest, Elizabeth certainly would have had a long life of prayer. In fact, just before we are told about Mary's pregnancy, we are told about Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah and their mystical experience of a divine messenger. This made Elizabeth ready to believe Mary and to validate her vision of God.

Second, Elizabeth experienced hardship in her life. She was unable to be pregnant for a long time. In a culture where women's primary function was to have children, not having a child would have been a great source of distress, shame and pain for Elizabeth. Thus, Elizabeth was no stranger to fear, pain, and disappointment. She knew brokenness firsthand, and when she got pregnant at an old age, she was so grateful and appreciative of the power of new life within her. She embraced her pregnancy as a sign of God's presence in her life.

Third, Elizabeth was a few months ahead of Mary in her pregnancy. She was able to help mentor Mary because she was a few steps ahead. They shared a common experience of God and of pregnancy, but Elizabeth was deeper into the experience which enabled her to help guide Mary along the way. I love how Elizabeth responds to Mary's visit with a song/a poem. She sings her cousin into a new experience in life. She lifts the spirit of her cousin through a song of deep joy. We all know the power of a song or a poem to bring us deep comfort or joy. Have you ever had that experience of sharing a song with a loved one and the power of that to affirm your faith and life? We tend to do that with children. We sing them into adulthood. But for adults, maybe the equivalent is when you share a quote, a prayer, a post, or a poem with a friend or a loved one to give them support and inspiration.

Of course, since we know the rest of the story, we know the power which these two women shared was extended to their children: John and Jesus. The son of Elizabeth, John the Baptist, became the forerunner for Jesus and ended teaching Jesus a great deal about ministry and faith. John the Baptist even baptized Jesus. He equipped him for ministry. Even Jesus needed a mentor! This is the biblical way because that is how God designed the world.

We too need mentors! Who has been your Elizabeth who showed you the way? Maybe you have had several. Maybe you are being called to be an Elizabeth at this point. No matter where you are on the journey, remember the power and necessity of others to guide you. Look for those who have experienced pain and heartache and who could help you discern where the Spirit of God is at work in your life. One of the key elements about finding or being a spiritual mentor is being able to help others listen to the "uncommon" wisdom of God which leads us to freedom to risk and to give of ourselves. A spiritual mentor is not someone who just agrees with you or supports you along the way. They are often people who are in touch with the aliveness of God's Spirit and who could point you in that direction so that you may become more alive to the divine in your life.

In the movie "The Miracle Season" we see a great example of a mentor who helps someone to live up to their potential. In the aftermath of Caroline's death, the coach of the volleyball team takes Caroline's best friend, Kelly, under her wings. Here is a scene where the coach comforts but also challenges Kelly to step up into her new role as the captain of the team. (Scene 28:45-30:19).

What did you see happen here? A mentor is not someone who comes from the outside of our experience but is someone who has gone through it themselves and thus is able to help us see the potential for our path.

I would like to end with a story from Rachel Remen about the power of connecting deeply with others. In her book (image on screen) *My Grandfather's Blessings*, Remen tells of a man who used to spend time with his son before he got cancer. "We would hike a mountain, a difficult climb, side by side, both focused on reaching the top. Then we would come down a different way, one behind the other to the car, and drive home.

We did this many times. In thinking back, I have a clear memory of many of these climbs, but no memory of anything my son said to me or I to him.”

Remen explains, “In child psychology what this man is describing is called parallel play and is normal for children between two and three. At this age, children use the same sandbox and even the same toys, but they are playing alone, next to each other and not with each other. Rather than relate to each other, they relate to a common activity which they do in parallel.”

“The man makes a great contrast between this and the way he and his son relate once the cancer has prevented him from climbing mountains. “I can’t do much just now, so we sit and talk. I ask him about his life and how he feels about it. For the first time I know what is important to him, what sort of a man he is, what keeps him going. And I talk to him too. I know now that I am important to him, that he wants to spend time with me and not because we can do physical things together. Sometimes we just sit together, being alive. The mountain got between us before. I had not known that.””

We have a lot of people in our lives, but only the ones who share deeply in our joys, sorrows, and souls are the ones who truly help us to fulfill our purpose in life and to see the miracles of God’s love in our lives. Amen.