

Text: [Luke 1:24-45 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: December 14, 2025

Title: “Room in Relationships” – Sanctuary Advent Series, wk 3

Theme: We need relationships where we can find sanctuary and safety enough to bring our full selves.

1

When you have big news – whether good or bad – who is the first person you want to call?

Who is the one person that you can rely on to share your joy, or to sit with you in your sadness?

Because, you know, there are a surprisingly large number of people in this world who seem to have a difficult time doing either one of those things

There are folks who will allow your joy to get swallowed up by whatever it is they’re feeling

And who, when you’re down, will dismiss your disappointment as no big deal

But when you find someone in your life who can handle both your joy and your pain

Who will allow you to bring your full self to the relationship – no matter what it is you’re going through

With deep empathy

And without judgment

That’s a gift from God – perhaps one of God’s very best gifts to us

It’s the kind of relationship that’s worth having

And worth keeping

2

I pray that every one of us might have someone who helps us feel
seen and understood at that level
All of us need at least one person in our lives who is going to
make room for us – no matter what we're going through

We often talk about the epidemic of loneliness that exists in
modern society –
not just in the US but in many Western nations
We usually blame it on the effects of technology,
the fact that so many of us live so far away from family,
and the decline of community connections like, for example,
churches

But our assessments often miss one critical point
Relationships are about quality, not quantity
It is possible to be surrounded by people
Even to have tons of interactions every day
And still feel lonely

Because often, what we're missing is that one person
Who is willing to make room for us
Other kinds of connections are good, but they're not the same

3

I don't know what kind of relationship Mary and Elizabeth had
prior to their miraculous pregnancies
Whether they were close, whether they had really known each
other at all

I sometimes imagine Mary showing up at Elizabeth's door out of
the blue – because what could you do in those days?
There was no way to call ahead

Still, somehow Mary was convinced that Elizabeth's house was
where she needed to be
After receiving this unnerving visit from an angel

Mary didn't have a lot of information to go on
She knew she was expecting
And she knew Elizabeth was expecting
Both under surprising and mysterious circumstances
So it seems natural Mary would seek comfort and reassurance
from the only other person she knew of who was going through
something similar

They connect because they are family
They connect because they are sharing this experience of
pregnancy at the same time
And they connect because God has spoken a special promise
over each of their sons

Luke says Mary spent about three months at Elizabeth's house
I have to imagine that during that time
These two women – of different generations and different
circumstances –
forged a deep connection that sustained them both
Each of them found in the other someone who saw, understood
and could identify with her experience
They made room for each other

4

This is the kind of connection we build with people who have gone
through it with us
A partner
Maybe our siblings
Folks we work with for years and years
Those who walk with you through your deepest personal crisis

Friends who have seen you at your lowest –
Maybe even at your worst
And have stuck by you

Humans are not made to do life alone
The story of Mary and Elizabeth illustrates that so powerfully
How relationships forged by common experience
Common challenges
Common joys and fears
Can transcend even differences in the generations

Mary and Elizabeth may well have had a 30 or 40 year age gap
between them
But it didn't matter
Elizabeth was there for Mary in her first trimester when, if she was
like most moms, she was dealing with morning sickness
And based on the timeline in the scripture, it sounds like Mary
was there for Elizabeth when she gave birth to John
This is what we all hope for – to have relationships where there's
space to hold everything life throws at us

5

I will be forever grateful for the people who were there for me
during the greatest challenges and the transitional times in
my life

I was fortunate to have some mentors who invested in me as a
young clergyperson

And was growing into my identity as a pastor
Again, crossing those generational divides

I've been blessed by church leaders who have allowed me to be
myself in the places where I've served

I'm so grateful to have had friends and family who surrounded me
during every challenge –
I think about things like my eye surgery a few years ago
And, of course, I have the greatest life partner that anyone could
ever ask for

Humans are built for relationships
Our brains are wired for connection
We literally have mirror neurons in our brains whose job it is to
help us empathize with the person across from us

It's our calling as people
And most especially as Christians
To create relationships that open up space for someone else to
truly be who they are, without fear of judgment
To share joy when they find it
And to find support when they need it
To "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who
weep" as Paul puts it (Romans 12:15)
That's a command from scripture

But many of us struggle with that
I think because it costs us something
Consider this: Mary traveled for DAYS to go and visit Elizabeth
And then she spent MONTHS away from home

Relationships require an investment of time and effort
That we're often not willing to give

Sometimes we see that in others
When our investment is not reciprocated
Even though we've gone out of our way for someone else
And yet that same person never seems to show up for us

Relationships like the ones we're talking about today
Ones that are spacious enough to hold all of who we are –
They require us to be able to step outside ourselves
To put our needs and our feelings on the back burner for a bit
In order to really meet the other person where they are

If someone comes to us ready to celebrate a joy that God is
unfolding for them
We have to meet the moment
It doesn't matter if we're maybe in our own fears and our own
concerns
We've got to find it within ourselves to rejoice with them
Because their joy isn't going to wait

One thing I notice about Mary and Elizabeth
Elizabeth wasn't concerned about the fact that Mary's son was
destined for something greater than her own
No, she is 100% ready to celebrate the one she calls "the mother
of my Lord"

Even in very close relationships – among friends, siblings, even
spouses
We often will let our own jealousy, our own self-doubt –
get in the way of our ability to share in someone's joy

But if you've ever experienced it
You know there is nothing worse – nothing more deflating –
than sharing joyful news with someone and that news being met
with apathy
Or even antipathy
If you want to destroy a relationship, squash someone's joy

5A

Likewise, we've got to make room for the people we care about to
share their fears, their doubts, and their sorrows
I can't help but think that Mary and Elizabeth often sat with the
weight of the challenges God had laid at their feet
Questioning whether they were up to the tasks they'd been given

Creating room in relationships means not trying to manage
someone else's feelings because they're inconvenient or
uncomfortable for you
It means having enough room in your heart just to sit without
thinking you have to fix it
Without imagining that you can reassure a deep sadness away
with a few platitudes

There's a time for reassurance, 100%
But so often we jump there without ever hearing the fullness of
what someone is afraid of
Or what's causing them pain

6

Today, I want us to reflect on this relationship between Mary and
Elizabeth
As a model for what it means to make room for one another
To console one another
To celebrate one another's victories
And to recommit ourselves to being the people
Who make space in our hearts for others

Because it's that space that we offer one another
Space that's expansive but always bounded by love
That allows us to grow into the fullness of all God is calling us to
be

I want you to remember, though
That these kinds of relationships are not cheap
They require an investment on our part
Mary traveled for DAYS to connect with Elizabeth
They spent MONTHS together

If you want these kinds of relationships, be prepared to make an
investment of yourself
Pick up the phone
Plan a visit
It starts with us!

Amen.

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