



ST ALBANS

Lean on Me

The Rev. Simone Hurkmans

December 19, 2021, Advent IV

I didn't know what to expect when the time came for me to give birth to Hugo. My obstetrician talked to me about the protocols for those like me of "advanced maternal age". I hoped that my labour wouldn't be 38 hours long like it was with Isabelle. I hoped it wouldn't end in a terrifying hemorrhage, like with Evelyne. I'll spare you all the details, but in a nutshell, labour with Hugo moved quickly at first, and then stopped.

I tried to rest as I waited. And waited. And waited. Nothing happened. I tried to sleep but couldn't, just in case something happened. Nothing happened. A whole night went by. Hugo was in there, snug as a bug. He was not ready to come out.

Eventually, the on-call obstetrician came by and assessed me. She had had a long day, evidently. She said "well you're gonna have to decide if you want a c-section." John and I looked at each other, well, what are the risks? What do you recommend? She said a few things that I don't really remember, basically about all the things that could go wrong during a c-section. She said "I can't make that decision for you, think about it and let me know." And she left.

By this point I was really anxious. Although nothing was actually happening, my lack of sleep and the memory of my previous birth experiences had sent me into a panic spiral. I felt trapped, exhausted and scared. We decided to go ahead with the c-section. We had to wait another 5 hours for it to happen because it wasn't urgent. At this point we'd been at the hospital for 30 hours.

When the anesthesiologist arrived to talk to me about the surgery, I was beside myself with panic. He'd read my chart. He gently put his hands on my shoulders, looked me in the eye and said: "You've had two difficult births and are worried this one is going to be the same. Everything is going to be okay. We do c-sections every day. This is not a complicated one. I have medication that will help your anxiety. We have to wait until baby is out to give it to you. I will be with you every



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step of the way. I will be sitting right by your head during the procedure. I am here for you.”

And he was. Just as he had promised. Although it was rough, Hugo came out safely, and I was okay. The anesthesiologist cared for me that day by meeting me where I was. He reassured me that he would be with me through the hard parts. And he followed through.

“What a thing, to be sent away and hidden at your [elderly cousin’s], your unbelievable story not believed, your whole future in question, not sure what kind of greeting to expect, and arrive at her doorstep to hear “Blessed are you, Blessed is this, God is at work here”. Elizabeth has such an *immediate* grasp of what is happening. She knows herself, and what’s happening in her own body. She’s been listening- Zechariah hasn’t said a word for 6 months, but she understands enough of what happened in the temple to interpret what she is feeling. She knows scripture and prophecy well enough to recognize God’s work in the world, when it is standing there in front of her. And she takes all of it, and just wraps Mary it in like a blanket. That’s why Mary can sing. Because of Elizabeth. I would very much like to be her, when I grow up.”¹

This is reflection on Elizabeth and Mary is by the Rev. Naomi Miller. She posted it on her Facebook page and I’ve been thinking about it all week. Mary can sing because of Elizabeth.

Who are the Elizabeths in our lives? Who are the people who immediately grasp what is happening, who meet us where we are, and then accompany us through the hard parts? They may be people we’ve known all our lives. Or, they may be people we’ve only just met. Like the doctor for me that day. The Elizabeths in our lives allow us to do hard things. They allow us to walk difficult paths. To keep going.

And I think you know where I’m going next, don’t you? When are we called to be Elizabeths to others? The story appears early in the Gospel of Luke. Have you noticed we’ve moved backwards through the Gospel during Advent? This story’s

¹ The Rev. Naomi Miller, via Facebook post, December 13, 2021.



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purpose is to “prove” to us that Jesus is the Messiah. John, in Elizabeth’s womb, recognizes the Messiah and leaps for joy. But the story is about much more than proving a point. It’s about the power of the feminine. It’s about being in tune with what’s happening in our bodies. It’s about the human body as a vessel for creation. It’s about good things happening in the darkness of the womb. It’s about friendship and family. And it’s about God at work in all of it. It’s about God at work in and through people.

This is the work we need to do as people. This is this the work we need to do as church. As individuals but also as community. This past week Chad hosted an online gathering for young adults. Pastor, artist and advocate Sunia (Sun-yuh) Gibbs was the guest speaker. She led a discussion on the intersection of faith, art & justice. I texted Chad after the gathering to ask how it went. He said he was moved when folks shared their thankfulness for having a space like the one he and Sunia (Sun-yuh) had created. A space where it’s safe to talk about equity and justice. A space where it’s safe to talk about God’s work in the world. A space where people feel less alone.

How can we be Elizabeths in our world right now? The last two or three days have felt so disorienting. At this time last week, we were feeling pretty good about things overall. And day by day, the news we heard got progressively worse. There is frustration, fear, disappointment, anger, resentment. The stress is causing significant conflict between families and friends. It feels chaotic and sad.

Justin Trudeau said yesterday “Omicron doesn’t care if we’re fed up with restrictions.” But what would Elizabeth say? I think she’d gently put her hands on our shoulders, look us in the eye and say: “I hear you, this sucks, and God is at work here too. I’m with you and God is with you. And I’ll be with you and God will be with you, through it all.” Amen.