



So, for those of you who have somehow managed to pull off absolutely perfect gifts for everyone on your list with a few days left to spare: on behalf of the rest of us mere mortals, congratulations on a job well done, to say the least! I suppose it's one of the benefits of having a younger child at home: who seems to be enthralled with bouncing balls and board books and little toys with music and knocking over blocks, all of which somehow manage to unleash a song of giggles and excitement, as if all can be

well with his world. As if relatively little things in life can somehow, somehow, set the stage for various forms of songs filled with joy. And I wonder if Elizabeth has something to offer to that possibility.

I wonder if the Gospel story we heard can be read with a blessed reassurance to the rest of us who struggle to find perfection this time of year. I wonder if that before one of the most treasured songs in all our human story that we know as the Magnificat, that before it's sung at all by the precious Mary, that she needed just a little bit of reassurance. That, even after being visited by an angel to let this teenage girl know that her world and the entire world was about to be drastically altered with even more love and grace and hope brought to life in the flesh with her help, that there might still be some fear and worry and even down-right trepidation. I wonder if Mary needed just a little more reassurance from her cherished cousin: a little more compassion and understanding and encouragement; that even overlooked Mary can help pull off a miracle to ensure a Gospel to never be taken away from all humanity. I wonder if Mary didn't need a perfect drawn-out lecture, but just a little embodiment of God's care for her. I wonder if Elizabeth has not only something to offer Mary, but to all of us, to set the stage for a song of joy to emerge.

But, yes, this is the time of year when we are not only encouraged but expected to pull off the perfect everything: not just the perfect gift for everyone on a list, but the perfect wrapping paper and ribbon and bows to go along with it. And not only that, but the perfect card to be included as well, with the perfect inscription from Hallmark or American Greetings, not to mention the perfect hand-written note as well. And not only that, but the perfect spread for a holiday feast, as well as perfectly working out all different schedules of in-laws and step-siblings, not to mention managing all the different family dynamics to ensure perfect peace and harmony. Pull all that off, and maybe the perfect song of laughter and joy can fill an entire household and spill over to the whole block around. No pressure or anything, as if seemingly December 25, and the days surrounding it are all riding on whether we mere mortals can somehow manage to pull it all off.

I wonder if so easily overlooked Elizabeth has something to offer not just to Mary, who may have more than understandably felt as if the pressure of the whole world was riding on her young shoulders, but I wonder if Elizabeth has something to offer to us, who aren't so sure we can quite pull off perfection. That Elizabeth gives just enough hope, just enough belief, just enough love to inspire a more authentic song of joy, giving thanks that God's presence might just carry over to the little things as well.

That young boy who seems to be easily fascinated with bouncing balls and board books, seems to be most fascinated with crawling up the stairs in the morning, because at the top are the doors to his siblings' rooms. And he just insists on being the one to knock to get them up, and along with it, unleash a song of giggles and excitement, as if it just might be another new day of hope and love to be shared. It's not a big deal in the grand scheme of all that happens in the world on a day-to-day basis, but sometimes the little things end up unleashing rather precious songs of our collective humanity. The songs that not only pull at our heartstrings, but inspire us to believe that the Gospel is indeed real: that

love can somehow manage to win every day, and that maybe all the powers of heaven could actually be unveiled in the littleness of a baby boy.

So, for those of you who haven't managed to find perfection for the gifts or the cards or the food or the family dynamics galore, I wonder if Elizabeth has a little something of the relentless Gospel to offer. As if even a few words of encouragement, can somehow help others feel cared for amidst all the comings and goings of life. As if even a little something said, can somehow make someone feel as if they are loved. As if even in the little things said and done can unleash a song that captivates our soul. Maybe Mary needed exactly that before she could sing at all. And maybe those who come in our midst in the days, weeks and years to come, don't always need perfection to experience a glimpse of God's grace. Maybe just a little knock on their heart with an embrace of laughter and joy and a blessed reassurance of the Gospel that will never be taken away from them or any of us; maybe that is more than enough to ensure that love will win yet again. For that perfect gift already taken care of for us all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!