

Often in Holiday movies so popular this time of year, *believing in the season* includes a kind of rationalization of magic, or happy memories, or people living out their better angels, and of course, of flying reindeer and their driver.

The word “believe,” however, actually comes from an old English word drawn from the German, *belieben*. *Belieben* has more to do with loving than with thinking. In scripture, to believe is to trust not in data or doctrines, but in a relationship.

The word “believe” is in today’s gospel reading where Mary visits her older cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth honors Mary for “believing what had been told her.”

That Mary believed doesn’t tell us what Mary thought, but that she trusts something to be so true that she stakes her life on it. This blessedness involves us too.

Blessed are we when we trust love to break in on our lives too.
Blessed are we when we believe God’s promise will be fulfilled in our imperfect lives.

Blessed are they who trust his or her love is as powerful or more so than whatever seems to rule the day.

Blessed are they who remember God is love and is creative in expressing that love.

Blessed are they who trust they’re worthy of respect even when they fail and have start over again.

Today’s proclamation about Mary is also true of Elizabeth, who was said to be barren, who is far too old to expect love and joy to be hers. Both young Mary and old Elizabeth are examples of something Bishop Emeritus of Stockholm, Krister Stendahl wisely urges:

To be Christian is to accept that we can’t use being human as an excuse for not doing great things. God comes to the likes of us – however barren we feel, or young, or old, or sidelined, or clueless about next steps.

Our being alive is a gift from God that carries weight. We have purpose. The question is, will we pay attention to God's involvement in that purpose.

The Luke 1 story of Mary and Elizabeth is a proclamation of human weightiness in the world. God looks for our response. Will we participate as Mary and Elizabeth did, say yes to being instruments through which God can enact a kind of world-reversing love? Blessed is he or she or they who trust they are called to this work.

I love these stories of the Visitation and the Magnificat because they witness to God's choice to empower whoever is willing for the sake of love. Mary could have said, "No way, Angel Gabriel. Don't ask such things of me."

Same with Elizabeth. She too could have hid away from the inconvenience of getting involved with God's work. Involvement is often inconvenient.

Just look at your own lives. When you get involved in caring for others, it usually takes your time. But that, Archbishop Tutu and the Dali Lama agree is where true joy is found. I hope we can view together the documentary about the making of their new book *Joy*.

The leap in Elizabeth's womb, and the song Mary sings attest to two unlikely humans who chose to not let their humanness be an excuse. And all generations have been blessed by their courage.

The stories of Elizabeth and Mary offer encouragement today because we are all called to things we see as beyond our powers, outside our imaginations, over our heads, or frankly, inconvenient. Mary and Elizabeth witness to what people can do when they believe God can do the impossible.

"Nothing is impossible for God," says scripture. Believing in God means believing seemingly impossible things are possible – like peace and good will being possible in a world as broken as ours.

Believing this in ways that take hold of our hearts will stretch us beyond what we think ourselves capable of. Elizabeth and Mary are stretched and changed by their audaciously trust in God's ability to do the impossible – for the sake of the neighbor.

Peace in our world hardly looks possible. *Good will toward all* may look more impossible yet. But to doubt their possibility and stand back from joining the work, is to do what Krister Stendahl urges us against – using our humanness as an excuse.

This Holy Season invites us to trust in incredible news – that God is also breaking into our time with grace and empowerment for good. That's why we come to Holy Communion – to be empowered by Christ's love given and shed for us.

At Communion we'll say together, *Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Blessed be God who is our Bread. May all the world be clothed and fed.*

That we believe in glorious impossibles like the world being fed is why our Christ cradle is here to accept our gifts of food, jackets, and blankets. It'll be here the whole 12 days of Christmas. Let's fill it to overflowing.

Amen