

**Two of a Kind**  
**Luke 1:39-45**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**December 20, 2020**

Have any of you heard of Frank the Gargoyle? I ran across Frank on Facebook the other day, all decked out on somebody's front porch. Pretty gruesome, even with his Santa hat and beard. Or maybe he's kind of cool. It depends on how you feel about gargoyles, particularly at Christmastime.

I know there is at least one person who does not approve of gargoyles at Christmastime. Do you see that photo's description on the right? It says, "So one of my neighbors left me a note informing me that my gargoyle statue is 'not appropriate' and 'not in keeping with the Christmas spirit.' They firmly suggested that I 'rectify the situation immediately.' Well problem solved! Frank is now festive!

I'm pretty sure that this is not what they had in mind, and I look forward to the future note stating as much, but 1) Frank is very heavy and he doesn't get moved and 2) I like him even if he's not so great at warding off evil Karens." The name Karen has become something to call someone when they express an opinion in a way you don't like.

Now, I'm not making a case for gargoyles at Christmastime, and I certainly don't approve of calling someone a "Karen" just because they express an opinion. No matter how they express it, name calling is just not Christian.

I show you this Facebook posting to make a point. These two women have very different views about Christmas and gargoyles. One is trying to make the best of her year-round, front-porch gargoyle, and the other is not impressed.

I mean look at how this went back and forth. Next to this new picture of Frank with his Christmas tree and Elf on a Shelf, it says, "Got a new note wanting to know if I think I'm funny. Why yes, yes I do," says the homeowner. "I decided to add an elf on the shelf and leave a note back that the elf is always watching. I may add one item a day now, like an advent calendar. Too bad my porch is so small; I could really deck it out."

Now that's a homeowner who's having fun. And no doubt, her neighbor is not. If you think things got a little out-of-hand from here, you're right. Here's Day 3 with a snowman, Day 4 with three hippos and a fake cat-skeleton complete with snowcap, and Day 5 with a wreath, Coronavirus doll, and a second snowman.

As I said, my point is these are two very different women. And yet, Christmas has brought them together, for better or worse. It just depends on how they approach the holiday season, with joy or with hate.

In our scripture reading today, we meet two other women who are very different – Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth and Mary are also brought together by Christmas – the very first Christmas. And while we know it's all for the better, that was not always a certainty from their point of view.

Mary has just been told by an angel that she will bear a son whose name shall be Jesus, the savior of the world, a gift from God. It's such an uncertain and scary situation that Mary (*Click*) goes to her cousin Elizabeth for comfort and support.

These are two very different women. Mary lives in town while Elizabeth lives out in the country. Mary is an unwed teenager while Elizabeth is much older and married to Zachariah. In fact, the only thing these two women have in common is their unborn children. Mary carries the blessed Jesus and Elizabeth is pregnant with John the Baptizer, two children who themselves will grow to be two very different people, John living in the wilderness and Jesus in town, John abstaining from rich foods and big parties and Jesus attending weddings and banquets, John baptizing with water and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Two very different people, and yet, two of kind.

John and Jesus, Elizabeth and Mary – they all share the Spirit of God in common. They have each been called from their very different backgrounds and beliefs to be an integral part of God's plan and purpose.

God uses all kinds of people, even people very different from one another, especially people different from one another. And yet, looking at Facebook, looking at the news, looking at our nation, our workplaces and schools, even looking at our families, you'd think having a different opinion and different values was the worst thing imaginable.

It's not! Mary and Elizabeth were two very different people. John and Jesus were two very different people. The story of salvation is seen throughout the Bible and throughout time arising among people who are very different from one another. How can we get back to embracing our differences instead of demonizing them?

Well, let's look at the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth for guidance in how we as a country, as families, as workplaces and classrooms can get along with one another, support one another, and even learn from one another – not despite our difference – but because of them, because God created different types of people and put us together to guide and support one another.

Mary comes to Elizabeth pregnant in some mysterious way, so mysterious that it nearly breaks up her relationship with Joseph, so mysterious that she nearly becomes the scandal of all Nazareth and beyond, so mysterious that Mary had only one safe place she could go, to her cousin Elizabeth's.

And instead of judging Mary, Elizabeth welcomes her, accepts her. In fact, she greets her with the warmest greeting imaginable, saying, "Blessed are you ...." It's the not sort of thing people typically say to an unmarried teenage mother. No, the people around such a young woman at that time are more likely to say, "Cursed are you. Cursed are you who has brought disgrace upon yourself and your family."<sup>1</sup>

And still today, we hear a lot of negative greetings like that these days, don't we? Judging instead of empathizing, fighting instead of working together, hating instead of loving. Even when we are sure it's someone gripped by sin, we as Christians are to hate the sin, but love the person, to come alongside that person as a positive influence.

Part of the problem is we don't come alongside one another anymore, when it comes to people of differing views and backgrounds, at least not like we used to. Instead, we see people these days elevating themselves above others and lording their beliefs and ideas over others. It's as if two people of good conscience can't have differing opinions and still be civil with one another.

In fact, not only do we elevate ourselves and our ideas, but we demonize the other person, just like Mary risked being demonized by the community she fled to seek out her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth did not judge Mary. She did not demonize Mary. Instead, Elizabeth call Mary "blessed." And not only that, but she embraced Mary as a kindred spirit and treated Mary with the respect she deserved, saying, "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?"

The reason Elizabeth elevated Mary above herself – calling her "mother of my Lord" – even though Elizabeth was her elder and, thus, superior to Mary – the reason she elevates Mary is because something inside her tells her that Mary is a special, blessed child of God with a special, blessed role in God's plan and purpose. The child in Elizabeth's womb tells her this. She says so herself, saying to Mary, "... As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy."

Naturally, we don't have that type of confirmation. When we encounter someone so different from us, there's no inner child telling us of that person's value and worth. Or is there? Think about it. When we look beyond the surface – and go beyond our judgmental nature as misguided and fallen human beings – we can see the true value and worth of people, all people, whether they are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.homileticsonline.com/>

standing before us, posting on Facebook, sitting next to us in school or at work, living next to us in our neighborhood – or in a country foreign to us – or living with us under the same roof.

The only way that we can hope to be a part of God's plan and purpose, embracing our role as an integral part of his divine story, is to focus – not on our differences – but on our common calling to share in the work and spirit of the Lord.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus – the salvation of the world – let us do our part to transform this world into the one that Jesus brings forth. The birth of Christ is the birth of a world that resists prejudice and embraces empathy, a world that stops all the fighting and begins to work together, a world that denounces hate in all its forms and relies on the power of divine love to overcome our differences and even use them to God's good purpose.

There's someone in your life, no doubt, someone in my life, toward whom we could be more empathetic, more cooperative, more loving. Why not pray about that today, this week? And then be waiting, expectantly, for your opportunity to shine the light of Christmas, the light of Christ's birth upon that person, that encounter, turning to that person with a loving heart, to share an empathetic word, display a helpful attitude, and embrace with Christlike love that to that person as another blessed child of God. Amen.