

A sermon for 2nd Sunday of Advent
How does a weary world rejoice?
We find joy in Connection.
From Luke 1:24-45
At Plymouth Presbyterian Church,
St Helens, Oregon
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Introduction

I begin the second part of our exploration of “How does a weary world rejoice?” with a story. It is the story of **Matt and Nicole Teague and their close friend Dane Faucheux, as told in the 2019 memoir and film *Our Friend*, starring Casey Affleck, Dakota Johnson, and Jason Segal.**

When Nicole was diagnosed with terminal cancer, the Teague family faced unimaginable challenges. Amid their struggle, Dane, a longtime friend, selflessly steps in to help. He puts his life on hold, leaving behind his job and personal plans, and moved into their home to provide emotional and practical support. His decision was an extraordinary act of trust and commitment, demonstrating the depth of their friendship.

Dane's presence becomes a lifeline for the family. He takes on household responsibilities, cared for the Teagues' children, and supported Matt as he navigated the pain of watching his wife's health decline. More than his physical contributions, Dane brought moments of laughter, comfort, and light into their darkest days. His selfless actions allowed the family to focus on spending precious time together, creating memories that would outshine the sorrow of their circumstances. Despite the hardship, Dane's companionship became a source of unexpected joy and solace for everyone involved.

This story captures the transformative power of trust and deep connection, mirroring the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1:24-45. Just as Elizabeth and Mary supported one another in faith and celebrated God's blessings during uncertain times, the Teagues and Dane found strength in their bond. Dane's actions remind us of the incredible impact of selfless love and the way trust can sustain and uplift us, even in life's most challenging moments.

Trust and connection are key.

Trust is the invisible foundation upon which every relationship stands. But what happens when that foundation begins to crack—on a global scale? Trust, or lack thereof, is at epidemic levels these days. It feels like a fragile thread—frayed and stretched almost to the breaking point. Who can we truly trust anymore?

- In government and politics, we've lost trust in our institutions and leaders.
- In news media, we've lost trust because of misinformation, bias, and now even deep fakes.
- In social media, trust erodes with algorithms that manipulate us and CEOs who allow misinformation to thrive.
- In law enforcement, trust falters when the promise to “protect and defend” feels unevenly applied.
- Even in our families, young adults increasingly say “I don't” to marriage, their trust in the institution eroded.

It's no wonder Merriam-Webster chose ‘authentic’ as the word of the year in 2023. We need more authenticity in 2024. As the lines between reality and deception blur, we crave for something real. Our search for authenticity also reflects something deeper: collectively we long for trust.

The Plane Story: A Reflection on Fear and Trust

Trust isn't something we give freely. It's earned over time—or lost in a moment.

There were some professors from an engineering school who were invited to go on a trip. After they were all comfortably seated on the plane, they were informed that the plane was built by their students. The professors got up and ran quickly to get off the plane, almost panicking. Only one professor remained calm and seated. When the other professors asked why he was so calm, he said, “I know the capabilities of my students. If they built it, I know this thing won't even start.”

We may have laughed, but doesn't their reaction mirror our own? How often do we let fear overshadow trust—missing out on something extraordinary because we're too afraid to believe?

Mary and Elizabeth: Trust in Connection

Think of the story of Mary and Elizabeth. Last week, we met Zechariah and Elizabeth, who received news of their miraculous pregnancy. Now, six months later, Mary receives news of her own. Confused and bewildered, she hears the angel Gabriel tell her, 'You will bear a son, and you will call him Jesus.' For a young woman, likely just 14, this news is overwhelming—not just exciting but dangerous.

- Who will believe her when she tells them this story?
- What will her fiancé think? Her parents? Her friends? Her community?
- How will she tell them?
- Will they laugh at her? Think she's crazy? Think her to be a liar?
- Will they reject her?
- And in that culture at that time . . . will they execute her for the crime of adultery?

And yet, Luke tells us that Mary 'went with haste' to visit Elizabeth. Not her parents. Not her fiancé. She traveled miles to see her cousin. Why? Because in a world that might reject her, Elizabeth was the one person Mary could trust with this extraordinary news.

When Mary arrives, Elizabeth throws open her door, her arms, and her heart. Upon seeing Mary, she exclaims, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' Imagine what that moment felt like for Mary—no shame, no fear, only affirmation and joy. In Elizabeth's home, two women found trust, connection, and the strength to rejoice together.

Advent: A Season of Trust and Connection

This Advent season, as we explore the question, 'How does a weary world rejoice?' we see in Mary and Elizabeth a profound truth: joy is found in connection. Advent is a season of waiting—waiting for light to break through the darkness, for promises to be fulfilled. But waiting requires trust. Trust in God's faithfulness. Trust in each other.

Here at Plymouth Presbyterian Church, we want to be a spiritual oasis, a place where trust and connection flourish, a place where authenticity is fostered in each of us. As someone recently said, 'It's hard out there. Going through this election year, it's going to get even uglier. We all need a safe haven.' That's what we hope to be—a haven where trust is rebuilt, where joy is rediscovered.

You may remember the line about a "weary world" rejoicing from the beautiful Christmas Carol "O Holy Night":

*A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;*

Last Sunday we began the series by discovering that perhaps the first step toward finding joy in a weary world is to acknowledge our weariness—to name it. We talked about how important it is to admit that there is a problem. The 12-step program is part of the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous that has helped so many people who struggle with addiction: admit there is a problem. A second part of AA that makes it effective for so many is in the connection—connection with other people struggling with the same problem.

Mary and Elizabeth were both dealing with unusual pregnancies—Elizabeth in her old age and Mary in her virginal state. Both Mary and Elizabeth's husband shared an encounter with the angel, Gabriel, who gave them news of the miracle. What a joy, for both women, to have someone to walk alongside and share this unusual journey together.

Mary and Elizabeth show us how a weary world rejoices—by finding joy in connection.

The Call to Action

So here's the challenge for this second week of Advent: connect with someone each day. Who in your life needs to

hear your voice today? Maybe it's a coworker struggling under the weight of stress, a family member you've drifted from, or a neighbor whose name you don't know. Reach out. Send a text. Make a call. Offer a listening ear. You don't need to walk miles like Mary. Connection doesn't always require grand gestures. It can be as simple as a kind word or an open heart. When you connect, you open a door—not just to joy for yourself, but for someone else in this weary world.

Closing Reflection

Mary and Elizabeth remind us that trust and connection are sacred gifts. They show us how a weary world rejoices—not through isolation, but through relationships that embrace, believe, and bless. This week, let's strive to be like Elizabeth, throwing open the doors of our homes and hearts. Let's become wellsprings of trust and joy, mirroring God's love that entered the world on that holy night in Bethlehem.

In a weary world, may we be the reason someone else rejoices.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe that joy is a sacred gift,
existing on a plane deeper than happiness,
stemming from the truth that we belong to God.

We believe that joy is not meant for isolation.
Joy is meant to be shared,
weaving us together in laughter and in hope.

And when joy feels impossibly out of reach,
we believe that part of being sacred community
is leaning on one another.

So together we say:
I will share my joy when yours runs out.
You will share your joy when mine runs out.
And in doing so, we will both see God.
Amen.