

## Sermon 12-20-09 Luke 1:26-55

Rev. Mark E. Sloss

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." 46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

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Our lives would be greatly diminished without song. Song is powerful; it has the power to turn the world upside down and out lives inside out. Songs of Lament help us to express our deep and difficult emotions, while helping to strip them of their ability to incapacitate our lives. Songs of praise unite us with the one to whom we lift our voices and with the ones whom we join our voices. Any joyous celebration would be somewhat diminished without a chorus or two of song.

All through the 1980's weekly meetings were held at Nicolai Church in Leipzig, Germany, to discuss politics and to pray for a peaceful resolution to the East/West division that had been in place since the end of WWII. Many of those meetings included time for singing. Some weeks there were only a dozen or so attendees, but 20 years ago, in the late summer and fall of 1989, the numbers began to swell, and the sanctuary was often filled to capacity and overflowing. Demonstration marches were planned, and people took to the streets together in peaceful protest and song. One night it was estimated that half the population of the city, 300,000 people joined in the protest, and with their voices raised in song brought the major symbol of German division, the Berlin Wall, a tumbling down.

Maybe some of you joined in singing songs like, "We Shall Overcome" as part of the civil rights movement. That was one of two songs that I recall singing the day that I was arrested for protesting apartheid policies at the South African embassy in Washington DC, the other being "A Mighty Fortress," which was a natural since this was a Lutheran Day of protest. It took a few more years before apartheid was dismantled, yet many the world over were surprised that it occurred without massive bloodshed, and I don't think that we should underestimate the role that song can play in creating a more just society.

Let us likewise, today, not underestimate the shaping power of the Song of Mary, the Magnificat, that we join in singing this morning. As we sing it, the power of God reshapes our world, both outer and inner.

As we sing it, may we be given the eyes of Mary! Eyes open to see what God is up to. And may we be given the heart of Mary as well. A heart open to participating in what God is up to. The very last words from Mary's lips before our text today that begins with her hasty trip to visit her cousin Elizabeth were these, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Let us turn now to Mary's song, ELW 251, and sing the first verse together. I invite you to let her words become your words. Let your soul magnify the Lord. Here's a question to ponder as we sing: What mighty wondrous thing has God done for you personally and specifically? How have you been graced? Let's sing the first verse.

*Vs. 1*

*My soul proclaims your greatness Lord; I sing my Savior's praise!  
You looked upon my lowliness, and I am full of grace.  
Now every land and every age this blessing shall proclaim-  
Great wonders you have done for me, and holy is your name.*

Fear of the Lord is an often overlooked and misunderstood concept in the average Christian's life. It's not a cowering, run for your life kind of fear, but more like a proper respect for the one who's given us the gift of life and frees us to live that life to the full. It's fear of the Lord that brings us to our knees in prayer. It's fear of the Lord that spurs us to examination of conscience and confession of our sin. It's fear of the Lord that brings us to the place where we surrender ourselves wholly and completely to God like Mary did with her, "Let it be with me according to your Word." And like Jesus did in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done."

In the next verse we sing about the great reversals that God brings about. All the outward changes begin with inner changes, in the thoughts of our hearts. As we sing, I invite you to imagine the proud, not as some other person out there somewhere, but as we ourselves gathered together in this place. What does our song say to us in light of the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor of the world? Here's another question to ponder as we sing: How does my ego and prideful willfulness get in the way of my participation in God's great reversal?

*Vs. 2*

*To all who live in holy fear your mercy ever flows.  
With mighty arm you dash the proud, their scheming hearts expose.  
The ruthless you have cast aside, the lowly throned instead;  
The hungry filled with all good things, the rich sent off unfed.*

This song embodies what Jesus life and ministry are all about. He's not about preserving the status quo, but rather radical change. How might our world be different if those who gather together in his name would urge their governments to spend less on weaponry and more on ways to fill the hungry with good things and bring about a more equitable world? Change like that begins in each and every heart.

I went to see the movie, *The Blindside*, the other night, and don't worry, I won't spoil the plot for those who haven't seen it. But, I will share why I think that it's become so popular and getting

good ‘word of mouth’ reviews. I think the story taps into one of our deepest and most basic human needs, the need for belonging, the need for a sense of home. It shows how one’s life can flourish when this need is fulfilled.

The final stanza of Mary’s song reminds us that we are all children of the promise. It reminds us that we are at home in God. It reminds us of the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham. It reminds us of the promise renewed at Sinai, “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” It reminds us of the covenant we renew each week through the sharing of bread and wine in which we hear our Lord say to us, “Welcome home.”

When God’s promise breaks through to the core of our being, when we know at the cellular level that God loves us, forgives us and wants us to live freed from fear, worry and anxiety, then we, like Mary before us, can count ourselves blessed.

Let’s sing the final stanza, and as we do so, may our song arise from that deep place within ourselves that knows the security of being at home in God.

*Vs. 3*

*To Israel, your servant blest, your help is ever sure;  
The promise to our parents made their children will secure.  
Sing glory to the Holy One, give honor to the Word,  
And praise the Power of the Most High, one God, by all adored.*

There is still power in this song of Mary that we sing again this morning. Power to turn the world and our lives upside down. It fills us with a vision of how God is at work reshaping the world, and by the very act of singing, we become participants in bringing this new world into being.

And even though many would say that the odds of such change are overwhelming, if not downright impossible, this song fills us with hope. And not only that it also fills us with courage so that we can contribute to bringing what we sing about into being.

So let’s put it all together and sing it one more time trusting that God’s at work in our song--creating a more just and equitable world for all. God’s at work in our song--changing us and blessing us. God’s at work in our song--bringing a whole new world into being.

It’s really quite a subversive thing for us to do. Let’s sing.