

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, December 5, 2021

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, we have this beautiful interaction between mothers to be. Elizabeth, who is about six months on in her pregnancy, and Mary, who's brand new in hers. And upon their first interaction, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy she says.

There is something about when God is at work and present within two people, when they are aligned in such a way that they might recognize within another God's work and movement within them. But our question this day that we must ask ourselves is do we hear what Luke hears in the story that we read this morning? Do we hear what it is that Luke would have us to hear, and how Luke chooses to open this gospel? First, with the quieting of one, and then with the joyous song of another.

The gospel writer in the echoes of Mary's singing this day, introduces us to the divine feminine, introduces us to the song of joy that grows from within Mary. That is, Luke hears an expression of God which aligns with qualities and attributes traditionally associated with women. Luke hears the divine as creative and nurturing and strong and wise, as courageous, and righteous in a world where the masculine expression of God is well established. The audience that would have been reading Luke or hearing that proclamation would have been well versed in that expression. That expression falls mute for a moment, so that Luke might introduce the divine feminine. Luke knows that this introduction is crucial because he knows that a fuller image of God will be critical to the life of faith that those who hear his words will need to go about living. Luke knows

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what Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister would later express that “in the long light of human history, it is not the belief in God that sets us apart. It is the kind of God in which we choose to believe that in the end makes all the difference.” So, he wants his reader to hear of his words, to understand the fullest expression of God possible, that which is feminine alongside that which is masculine, alongside that which is beyond both. Here's the beautiful part that our tradition too often forgets. Each of these expressions lives within each of us. Each of these expressions lives within each of us. Celtic mystics, they've known this to be true for a very long time. In fact, it is these different energies that combine to create love within us.

A few years ago, I was listening to an interview with John Philip Muell described gendered expressions of God in the Celtic tradition. Then he said these words. “They're full of color, these expressions full of color and character, so many of these feminine expressions of sacredness in the Celtic world, but it's with a real sense of needing one another. It's not just speaking about the outer realm of men and women and relationship, though it's certainly speaking about that, but I think it's also speaking about the feminine and the masculine energies within all of us yearning to be conjoined, needing to make love within us. If we are to be moved towards wholeness in our lives and in our faith these unique expressions of God are the substance of how love is indeed manifest within us.” When I heard John Philip Newell say these words, I had to pause and rewind and listen to them again. These different energies within us, indeed, making up what it is that creates love within us, all of us. With all of those energies Luke seems to know this. He seems to know that that the most expansive image must be communicated to the people. It is only this most expansive image that can truly reflect the God of all creation. Only this expansive image will be able to hold together all the people over all time and space, and it is with this expression of God that Luke reveals a deep well of spiritual insights. Do you hear what Luke hears? Do you hear what he wishes for us to this day? Luke wants his listeners to hear that the incarnation of God begins in the womb.

He wants us to hear the scandalous truth that Mary will give birth to God, and that God does not simply appear but is nurtured by the body and the spirit of a woman. God is labored into existence. Do you hear what Luke hears? Luke needs the listener to know this truth because what is true for Mary is also true for those who will hear his words and is true for each of us. God has placed within you a unique expression of the divine that is waiting to be born in this Advent season. So, the question we must ask then is what has God planted within you that you are to nurture so that it might be born into the world? What is in utero within your soul? What is it that God wishes to labor into existence through you? Because if you truly hear Luke this day, then you will hear that in this Advent season God's work is happening within you.

Mary is the archetype for this work, and the idea of the spirit of God born within us spending time being nurtured by our spirit and by our body and by the grace of God so that in due time God might be born anew in the world. Do you hear what Luke hears? Do you hear what he wishes for us to hear this day?

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As I listen more closely to the revelation that Luke gives to us in these first few verses of the first chapter of a gospel that will unpack the good news of Jesus Christ, I have a hope for you. I have a hope for myself, and a hope for our church, that we might truly hear this morning that this Advent might be a time when we contemplate the deepest truest part of ourselves and a time when we might mine together the resources of our collective soul so that we might contemplate what it is that God has placed within us yearning to be born.

When Mary made her way to her friend's house, and she spoke a word of greeting, the child within Elizabeth's belly leaped for joy.

What is beautiful about this image for us is that we do not walk this Advent journey alone, but with others who God yearns to be co-creative with as well. We are to greet each person in this season with the expectation that God is doing something within their soul too, that God is nurturing some unique part of who they are and that the world needs who they are to be born anew within it. When we connect with this truth, and when we connect with this place within ourselves, my prayer is that we might respond with a song similar to Mary's, a song of joy and a song of hope. That we might respond reassured that God, indeed in this Advent season, continues God's life-giving work in the here and now. Wait. May we find comfort in this truth, and may we find challenge in it as well. May we know that, indeed this day, God is nurturing within each of us something brand new that the world needs to be born. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.