

Lauren Baske Davis
12.13.20
First UCC Northfield
Sermon on Luke 1:46-55 - Singing a New Song

Luke 1:46-55

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.'

Sermon – Singing A New Song

Every time I see the sidewalk poetry, you know, the poems stamped into the concrete that are all over Northfield, I always stop to read them. If I'm with my family, my family gets to stop to read them, too. There is one particular poem though, that takes hold of me each time I read it: "When the songs of our grandmothers fill our mouths, we are obliged to sing." It stops me in my tracks every single time. My grandmother was a monumental figure in my life, and when I read those words I'm heartsick for my Grandma and simultaneously filled with joy.

I wonder who the people are in your lives who taught you to sing your song? The songs that you know, the songs that you carry within you that sustain you?

It's not necessarily easy to tell, but our scripture reading for today is a song. Mary's song. She sings of all that God has done for the people—her ancestors—through the years: (*sing*) "My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you...."

Does this mean times have been easy or that her ancestors didn't struggle? Any scripture historian or bible lover can tell you that the ancient Israelites experienced struggle after struggle. Of course, we know the story of the Israelites and Moses escaping slavery in Egypt. But the truth is that over a couple thousand years, these people experienced occupations by something like 5 different foreign powers, one after another. They lived in and through multiple diasporas—exiles—being forced to leave their homes and land and flee to

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other lands by the occupying military, or experienced oppression under the boot of whatever empire was ruling the day.

One could look at these stories of the people and wonder where God was. There are all sorts of ways to make sense of it. But the song Mary's grandmothers, grandfathers, the story her people taught her was a song of God's faithfulness to the people through all those generations. God's abiding presence and commitment that the night would not last forever and that joy would come in the morning. That their God is a God who brings down the tyrants and brings up the humble, the ignored, the ostracized, the oppressed, the people others have tried to erase for love of power, greed and privilege. "My soul proclaims your greatness, O God...."

Just before Mary sings in the scripture, she is told by the angel Gabriel, that she will give birth to a child of God's whose name will be Jesus. Somewhere in her heart, Mary receives this news and goes from "how can this be?" (Not just because she's an unmarried virgin, but because I think any of us would be asking, "how can this be?") and travels within the space of her own heart, maybe with the songs of her grandmothers on her lips. And she goes from saying, "how can this be?" to remarking, "nothing is impossible with God."

Maybe part of being a prophet is acknowledging the people around you who taught you to sing the songs of faith. We all have someone who taught us to hope, maybe to sing songs, figuratively or literally. My grandpa, a quiet, wry humored, nature lover and former hobby farmer, taught me "O Tannenbaum," which is the German version of "O Christmas Tree." And because of his love for it, he imparted much more to me than praise for a tree. It was celebration of God's entire creation. When Elliot, our 8-year-old was 1, my mom taught him "O Come All Ye Faithful" on his baby toy piano before he could ever have uttered the words from his own mouth.

Maybe that's how it was for Elizabeth and Mary. That Elizabeth, Mary's relative, taught her the stories of faith, the songs of a God who does incredible things for the people. We don't know if that's the way it was, but we do know that when Mary comes to Elizabeth's home to stay for a few months, Mary tells Elizabeth her news, and Elizabeth *doesn't* say, "how can this be?" She believes her. "Blessed are you, Mary, among women," Elizabeth says. Can you imagine being Mary, carrying scandalous news that's also beyond belief, and to tell your family in a whisper not knowing how they'll respond, only to be greeted with a blessing? The phrase "empowered women empower women" probably hadn't been invented yet, but that's what was happening so long ago.

And yes, Mary sings a song of what God has done, but she is also singing what God will do. Mary, an unmarried young peasant woman, who will give birth far from home in Bethlehem, as the story tells us, in a random barn, Mary who will flee Herod's decree to kill all the firstborn children and live in Egypt for a time, Mary, who will raise her son Jesus, singing him the songs of the Faith before he can even speak, that Mary sings.

You see, she is doing this marvelous thing, Mary the prophet. She is singing forward, singing into the future. She is singing about all of the future things God will do. She is singing about the future--as if it is the past. As if it's already happened, the lifting of the lowly, the bringing down of the tyrants. In this world we know that very little is certain. But Mary is

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singing of the God who will bring good things about, just as surely as one can be. She sings so confidently, is so full of the spirit and those songs of her ancestors, that she sings so surely that she's singing as if god has already done the things that haven't happened yet.

I can't help but wonder: what songs are you singing? What songs do you carry within you from the people who have nurtured you? What are the times that joy bubbles up in you to such a degree that you must sing? Of dance, or pray or just throw open your arms and say wow, thanks? No matter what is happening, no matter what will happen, the world, the people and creation needs the joy we have. When the songs of our ancestors, or our friends, or our... fill our mouths, we must sing. As one of our ancient ancestors in the faith, Ireneaus said, "the glory of god is a human being fully alive." Sing your songs, my friends. If the world doesn't need more joy right now, I don't know when it will. Don't let Mary sing alone! And as mystic Meister Eckhart said, "We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born." May it be so. Amen