

"RESTORE US"

Micah 5:2-5a Luke 1:29-55

December 23, 2018

York Center Church of the Brethren

Pastor Christy Waltersdorff

Don't you wonder what that time was like for Mary and Elizabeth? One almost too young to be pregnant and the other definitely too old. Both miraculous pregnancies-- though in very different ways. I am not surprised that as soon as Mary said "Yes" to the angel Gabriel, she headed to the hill country to see her cousin. It was a trip of about eighty miles, not an easy one for a young woman alone. But it was just the first of many difficult journeys this young women would make. The Angel told her that Elizabeth was also expecting a baby so off she went. As soon as Mary stepped into the house and said, "Hello," Elizabeth's unborn baby did a somersault in her womb. That was just another confirmation to Mary that her child was, indeed, extraordinary.

Elizabeth took on the role of a prophet when she cried out, "*Blessed are you among woman, and blessed is the child in your womb!*" She calls Mary "*the mother of my Lord.*"

Can you see how truly outrageous this scene is: two women who were considered the property of their father or husband—one old and one young, one past her prime and one barely reaching it. On these two women rested the weight of God's new revolution. And they carried it well.

As the months passed, their bellies swelled as their sons grew within them, and they alone possessed the knowledge that God was about to invade the world. To the casual observer they were just two women knitting booties and encouraging one another in their absurd pregnancies. But we know they were two God-chosen prophets carrying blessings they neither asked for nor expected- but cherished nonetheless.

Mary and Elizabeth lived in the difficult days of Herod the Great, whose casual brutality was backed up with the threat of the power of the Roman Empire. Corruption was the order of the day as the poor got poorer and the rich got richer. Corruption, injustice, and greed were rampant.

The bullies and power mongers spread their evil ways throughout the land and for God's people, the world seemed hopeless.

It is into this world that Mary opens her mouth and sings, not a lullaby, but a revolutionary song of freedom. It is a song of pure joy and praise; a song of reform and upheaval. It is a song of power. Not exactly what one would expect from a pregnant teenager.

Theologian N. T. Wright describes it this way: *"It's the gospel before the gospel, a fierce bright shout of triumph thirty **weeks** before (the cradle in) Bethlehem, thirty **years** before (the cross on) Calvary and the empty tomb. It's all about God, and it's all about revolution. And it's all because of Jesus."* (1)

Mary sings on behalf of all those who, in their despair, still want to believe, deep down, that God will make a way where there is no way. She sings of deliverance from their wilderness of injustice and fear. She sings of a God who sees their pain and reaches down to comfort and save them.

She sings of a God who turns the world right side up, lifting up those trapped on the bottom of the pile and tossing aside those who think they deserve to stand on top. Nothing had changed in the world around her but everything had already changed within her. From the moment Gabriel first announced this crazy scheme she knew the truth of God's promises and she was never the same again. She lived and sang as though the truth were true, as though the promises of God had already been fulfilled.

Mary's words shout loud and clear that God is going to change the world. God has not forgotten the people and suddenly those who are out will be in and those who are down will be up and those who are losers will be winners. In God's new world everything is up for grabs.

This was good news to people like Mary- those who were marginalized in society, those who were oppressed. But it was very bad news to those in power— then and now.

In the 1980's the corrupt and dictatorial government of Guatemala banned Mary's song because it was deemed to be too subversive and too politically dangerous—for them. Good heavens- what if the peasants actually read this part of the Bible and believed it! They might revolt against the dictator! Mary's song incites fear only in those who will do anything to keep things the way they are. Her song gives hope to those who long ago lost hope.

Centuries before Mary sang her bold and holy song, another prophet sang a similar one. In the eighth century, Micah looked in dismay at the world around him and knew that God was not pleased. The people had strayed far from their divine

covenant; injustice was rampant; the nation was in extreme distress and the holy city of Jerusalem was under siege by their enemies. In a time when despair and defeat permeated the air, the prophet Micah spoke the truth as though it were true. He said injustice is not permanent. He said that God is still acting in the world and the people better wake up and turn back to God.

Micah is the one who said that God will *"turn their swords into plowshares."* He gave the people clear instructions about what God required of them: *"To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God."* He dreamt of a day when the people would no longer study war and violence and all would live in comfort and peace. Micah spoke of a God who is angry but who will forgive, a God of compassion who believes in second chances.

I wonder what Micah and Mary would have to say to us today? What would they say about massacre after massacre in our schools? About the deaths of the innocent in Yemen and Syria, in Chicago and Palestine?

What would they say about our complacency and passivity in such a violent world? What would they say about a nation that refuses to allow people at risk to find safety on our borders? What would they say about political leaders who take pleasure in shutting down the government while people struggle to pay their bills?

What would they say about our addictions and our fears? Our worries and our anger?

I think they would say that our God is a God of shimmering, outlandish surprises. I think they would say that God is with us in the aches we live with each day; that God grieves and weeps with us in our sorrow. I think they would say that we are all pregnant with the possibilities of outrageous new life; that we are all capable of becoming more than we are right now. I think they would say that God's extravagant grace is extended to each one of us and to all who breathe upon this earth. I think they would say that God's astonishing surprise at Christmas is a promise of hope in a world that many believe is hopeless.

I think they would say that we are truly children of the Most High God, sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ, and perfect vessels of God's wild and unpredictable Holy Spirit. I think they would say that we are indeed blessed and are called to be blessings to others.

They call us to sing their songs of revolution at the top of our lungs and not to stop until all are free, until all are filled, until all are safe, until all are loved.

Mary was not a passive recipient in God's crazy plan- she was an active partner. Think about this-- she smuggled God into the world inside of her own body. Who has the courage to do something like that? She was God's dwelling place. Her blood gave God life. Each and every day she was aware of the changes God's promise was creating inside of her- in her body and in her soul.

Who else in the world has ever had such power?

She could not ignore the coming of Jesus- and neither can we. She was blessed and we are too.

Like Mary, God meets us where we are- in our ordinary, everyday lives, and invites us to be a partner in God's outrageous plan for the world.

During this holy time of year when we celebrate the inexplicable gift of this impossible birth I wonder----- what is being born in us? And are we willing to sing about it?

What is God creating within our hearts? Within our souls that will bring hope and healing to a tired and weary world.

What is being born in us- right here in this place? Are we willing to be partners with God?

Thirty years after his mother sang her song of freedom and hope, Jesus stood in his hometown synagogue and claimed these words from the scriptures: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Like mother, like son.

Sounds like Jesus learned a lot from his mother.

I hope we will too.

Amen.

*End Notes:*

- *LUKE FOR EVERYONE, Tom Wright, Westminster John Know Press. 2001. P. 14.*

