

*For the Love of God*  
**Reflections on Luke 1:46-55, Mary's Song of Praise**  
**December 17, 2017 Michael Barrett**

On this third Sunday of Advent, we pause to consider love. Embedded throughout Scripture – both Hebraic as well as Christian are words, warnings, and wisdom dealing with handling the passion of love. In the many faith journeys our Bible presents, love arises out of affection or admiration, devotion or desire, or enthusiasm or experience. The Bible, however, uses *love* as a verb rather than as a noun – almost always love means actually doing something. Right or wrong, visible or concealed, loud or silent, acknowledged or ignored, the passion of love registers in the seemingly inescapable actions it impels.

In the Bible, sometimes the author expresses love in song. God has programmed us to remember songs. Songs are the stuff of memory and inspiration and above all, love. When I was younger, many couples, like our parents before us had a favorite love song –the two of us simply nicknamed such ‘our song’ and hit the dance floor whenever it was played. For my grandparents that song was “Deep Purple,” for my parents it was “It Had to be You”, and for me it was “Do You Want to Dance?” What is your love song?

The Bible has at least three truly magnificent love songs that most of us remember. For the love of God we seem to easily remember them each.

The first great love song is Psalm 23 – the Lord is My Shepherd. This is a song that expresses how God loves us by meeting our needs, leading us on safe paths, foreseeing dangers, healing us, comforting us, feeding us, and remaining ever loyal to us. This is a song to listen to often and not just at memorial services. It chants how God loves us.

The second great love song comes from Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 – 13 – the Gift of Love. This song encourages with advice about how we are to love each other – with patience, kindness, rejoicing, believing, hoping, enduring and abiding. This is a song to listen to not just at marriage ceremonies but at anytime we need direction on how to love another. It intones how we are best to love each other.

The third great love song is the one read this morning by Bootsie -- Mary's Song, also known as the Magnificat, because Magnificat is its first word in Latin, from Luke 1: 47-55. This song voices how we are to love God; personally, publically, and prophetically. It is a song to sing not just at Christmas but often whenever we strive to honor, to grow in, and to serve God.

In many senses, Mary's Song is past, present and future. From her heritage, Mary weaves a song drawn from the tapestry of Hebrew women past -- Mariam's 'Sing if the Lord' (Exodus 15:19-212); Deborah's 'Perish all Your Enemies' [Judges 5:1-31], Judith's "O Lord, You are great and glorious' [Judith 16:1-17]; and especially, from Hannah's 'My Heart Exalts in the Lord' [1 Samuel 2: 7-10].

It remains an ironic, yet historical fact, one worth remembering, that at so many critical turning points in Hebrew history -- the Exodus, the formation of the Kingdom, while Israel was besieged, and during Philistine occupation -- God raises and inspires women to voice His will in song. Now, during the height of brutal Roman oppression, God again does the same with Mary.

Mary's song is the first of four powerful hymns in the Christian Testament, all found in Luke. Zechariah will follow with Benedictus -- 'Blessed be the God of Israel'; then the angels will voice Gloria -- 'Glory to God in the Highest'; and finally, Simeon will chant Nunc Dimittis -- 'master now You are dismissing Your servant.' None of these will be greater than Mary's Magnificat -- 'My soul magnifies the Lord.'

In a sense Luke uses Mary's Song to stop the story. Essentially, Luke calls a timeout. It is important for us to realize why. Stop! Look! Listen! Luke is warning us that what is happening is profound. What God is doing is reformatational, radical, and revolutionary. Take account of what is going on!

In this context Mary goes to visit her elder, also pregnant cousin, Elizabeth. On Mary's arrival Elizabeth's unborn child, John, jumps for joy in Elizabeth's womb. Elizabeth shouts her elation recognizing the divine presence in Mary's womb. In response Mary sings the first and greatest song of the incarnation.

*My soul magnifies the Lord*

Mary is not making God Himself any larger, that's impossible. But by paying attention to God she is enlarging, she is magnifying, the presence of God in her life. She is thinking much greater thoughts about God. For the love of God, we can each do the same. When Jesus comes into our lives – he comes not into a womb but into our hearts. We can think greater thoughts of God. Inviting God's greater presence in our lives is one way we can love God.

*and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

Mary commits her very spirit, her entire passion, her direction, her desire, and her disposition all toward God and does so joyously! For the love of God we may strive to do the same. A spirit consumed with love for God may be expressed in a range from very quiet – like Mary of Bethany in silent tears perfuming the Jesus' feet, to very loud – like David dancing and singing at the top of his lungs before the Ark. The simple dedication to trust God is another way we can love God.

Why does Mary celebrate? Her stated purposes in this song are personal, public, and prophetic. Her causes deal with her character, her community, and the covenant.

Mary begins her song with her personal reasons for loving God. It is important to remember that she does not stop there.

God appreciates both personal and the public expressions of worship. God desires us to be together in congregational worship – there is simply an intensity that often occurs more readily when we worship together than if we are trying to worship alone. Think of shared cultural experiences – the concerts, theater productions, movies, the marches, etc. Being part of an audience intensifies feelings – for good or for bad. But, often love of God and the realization of God's love also often begins at a personal level.

Mary's personal reasons:

*He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant.*

Lowliness. Mary is humble. Yes, there are all those the physical characteristics – she's unmarried and pregnant, she's probably about 14 years old, since the Bible does not mention it (which it would if she were), she isn't either beautiful or brainy; and she certainly isn't from wealth. But

Mary's humbleness is more than that. The key here is that she recognizes that she needs the favor of the Lord – she cannot rely on her own efforts to bring about her deliverance. She realizes that she and her people are in a world of hurt from which they cannot extirpate themselves. Do you know anyone like that?

God comes to people who need help – Psalm 34:18 the brokenhearted and the crushed. Jesus spent much of His ministry coming to people who recognized their need for help. Sometimes to open up for the love of God the first thing we need to do is to ask humbly for His help. That is another way to love God.

*Now all generations will called me blessed*

Yes, Mary is blessed – depicted in thousands of paintings, voiced in many prayers, and the name source of countless churches. Mary is the most popular name in the western world. Mary accepted that blessing without, as did Moses or Zachariah, demanding some sort of sign.

We too need to recognize that we are destined to be blessed. If Jesus is within us and we express His presence by striving to imitate his character, his compassion, and his care then we too will be called blessed. Read Matthew 25:34 or 1 John 3:2 or even Revelation 20:6. For the love of God the second thing we may want to do is to actually trust that God's intention all along has been to bless each and every one of us.

Does this translate into a life of nothing but comfort is a world full of suffering? Probably not – Mary, herself, would know that a sword would pierce her soul, she would lose young Jesus for three days at the Temple, she would seriously question her son's sanity when he turned 30, and of course, know abject despair over the course of three days as arrest, trial, execution, and death unfolded. But, then, at last, followed by incredible, unexpected blessing.

Another way of loving God is to stand steadfast through happiness and hardship, grief and gladness, suffering and satisfaction. Believing in blessing.

*For the Mighty One has done great things*

Mary celebrates the nature of God. God is *mighty* – God does the impossible – the barren conceive, the incurable are healed, the dead are raised, and even hearts of stone can be made to care. God is *holy* – God is worthy of complete devotion for He is perfect in His goodness.’ Holy, Holy Holy’ she sings and we have echoed that that verse since, God is *merciful* – *from generation to generation*. Eternally – a source of compassion, clemency, and charity is intrinsic to God’s nature. As John Donne wrote, *God’s mercy hath no relation to time, no limit in time. When God loves, He loves to the end; no only to their end to their death, but to His end; and His end is that He might love them still*. God’s end is endless.

Mary’s Song now moves to express joy for the way in which God cares for her community, her Israel, and her world as she tries to come to grips with what is happening. In the process of voicing this song, Mary realizes that the same principles of power, holiness, and mercy with which God deals with her and us on a person level are the same principles with which God deals with the world at large. Even though Jesus is yet to be born Mary keenly realizes all that is afoot. Note the now past tense of the verbs – God has scattered, has brought down, has lifted up, has filled with, has sent away, and has helped. The future is now! The kingdom is here!

*He has scattered the proud IN THE THOUGHTS OF THEIR HEARTS*

In the thoughts of their hearts – this is not about pride or power or wealth being automatically bad. This is about how the heart uses those things. This is about proud people who plot and scheme to maintain and perpetuate their arrogance. This is about people who could strut sitting down. This is about people who delude themselves with a sense that they are entitled to moral superiority based on their position in life. This is about people who suppose that their wealth or education or status or privileges are somehow due to their own spiritual excellence. If there is a need to be proud, one way to love God is by being proud of Him and others.

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones*

This is a revolutionary social reversal. There is no candy-coating this one. This is about powerful people who grasp for social respect and positions of honor *WHILE* excluding the less fortunate and less socially desirable from kinship. Those powerful ones are the people then and now in for a rude awakening. God is not calling for a replacement of the privileged with the

proletariat, perpetuating the same old class system with a reversed cast of characters. God wants us to be one in our love for each other. One way of loving is God by lifting up the lowly.

*He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty*

Again there are many ways of being rich – it is how the heart uses that wealth that matters. Compared to most of the rest of the world, everyone in this room would be held as rich. Mary is singing of a spiritual reversal here. Has the desire for material things dulled our spiritual sense? When do we actually hunger and thirst for righteousness. God stands by to satisfy the longing heart, God stands by to fill the hungry soul with good things. Another way of loving God is helping fill the hungry.

We are not made to be self-sufficient. In His love for us God wants us to recognize that. We are designed to be there for each other – for all the Marys and Josephs and fisherman and tax collectors and prostitutes – the lepers, the blind and the lame, the homeless, the single parents – the bereft centurions, the despairing, the diseased, the desolate and the dying. When we strive to reach out and help each other, God stands closest.

*He has helped His servant Israel*

Please note the choice of words – servant, remember, mercy, promises, ancestors Abraham. These are all covenant terms. Mary is rejoicing because God keeps His promises. Always. Forever. Eternally. God is acting out of His own self-giving nature has embraced us in relationship. God ever continues to help.

These are powerful words. These are dynamic words. These are revolutionary words.

These words challenge us not to look to some other secular or political or economic or social power to save us from the chaos we have helped create. Although God may very well use technology or science or social action or education or political reform, in and of themselves, without God, those efforts are futile in bringing hope, meaning, or love to our lives.

Mary's Song celebrates the coming of a true savior. Much of the joy she sings with her words will be realized in the ministry of her son. Our job is to

support the hopes she expressed and the mission undertaken by her son,  
God's son.

This Christmas, let each of us, for the love of God, like Mary, in our own hearts melodize and harmonize our own personal carol, based on knowing that our trust and our hopes and our commitment could not be clearer – for the love of God, Jesus is our Savior.

Amen and God bless you.