

## **Luke 1:39-55**

Well, we have been waiting...

And how beautiful it is that we have come full circle from a couple of months ago when we were studying the book of Ruth, and then 1 Samuel. And Today's scripture should remind us of the book of Ruth...because here too the main characters are women. As I mentioned, Ruth is a book many scholars believe was written by a woman, and the narrative in Ruth is about two women who love each other and struggle to survive as childless, husbandless women in a patriarchal society. Ruth, you remember, was the Moabite woman who loved her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi, and who followed Naomi back to Bethlehem after all of the men in their family had died. And we learned that Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of Ruth and That is why the Holy couple will have to go to Bethlehem when Caesar demands the census be taken. But before that trip to Bethlehem, Mary goes to see her older cousin Elizabeth who is 6 months pregnant. And in this scripture the Women are talking to each other, celebrating their pregnancies. And, in that joy, Mary sings a song which draws heavily from Hannah's song in 1 Samuel.... And Naomi's song in Ruth. Isn't it wonderful how these stories have converged at this pivotal point in our faith's history? Culminating in song. The songs of women.

And ALL of the songs are about birth and change. They are all about paradigm shifts. Shifts of power. And These songs are very similar to Jesus' most famous sermon... the beatitudes.

Read - Matthew 5:3-12

New Birth and paradigm shifts are the themes of today's scripture. These women's songs are about social justice. Just like Jesus' ministry illustrated.

We rightly cherish the birth of Jesus, God incarnate, at Christmas. and we rightly revere the crucifixion and resurrection for they seal us forever in our Lord. Still, we Often forget that Jesus had a ministry. As I always say, Jesus did not become human so that you could acknowledge him as your personal savior, lead a good life, and then go to heaven when you die. Because for three years, Jesus tried through word and example to teach his disciples what being human should look like. It looks like bringing heaven to earth. It looks like an upheaval of social and political norms. It looks like poor people being supported, hungry people being fed, sick people getting health care. It looks like the people that have been cast aside being welcomed in. It looks like what these women describe in their songs.

When we looked at the story of Ruth, we saw that the book of Ruth, the story of Ruth and Naomi, is an indictment against systemic injustice. The two women were forced to go on what passed as ancient welfare because they were women without husbands or sons. In other words, their oppression was systemic. Hannah's song and Naomi's song are about the elevation of Human beings who have no agency. And Mary, pregnant with Jesus, sings the same song. And then Jesus preaches the same message. This arcing theme in scripture is so obvious that it takes willful ignorance to miss it. God is concerned about people on earth, in communities, ESPECIALLY people who are cast aside.

None of these women mention heaven. Instead, they mention very earthly **communal** justice. Because Salvation is not only individual, it is a communal event. Yes, of course Mary is filled with joy as she sings "**my** soul glorifies God!" "I rejoice in **my** savior" but then she starts singing about the way God turns the tables on human constructs of power. Just like

Jesus flipped the tables in the temple. Mary, the mother of Jesus, understood that connection in God includes and transcends individualism. Yes, God loves each one of us and has created us each in all of our diversity, As the mystic teacher James Finley writes: When God created you, God did not have to think up who you might be. God eternally knows who you eternally are and are called to be from before the origins of the universe. And

As St Paul writes “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Yet, Paul also writes about the body of Christ, about how no one Individual can exist independently in that body. The eye can’t say to the hand, “see you later, I’m heading out on my own”.

This is what Mary and Hannah were singing about...this connection between recognizing that God is our source, this individual birth, and recognizing that God is the source of everyone else as well and the fact that **that** recognition will lead to revolution, to change, on earth.

Jesus would spend his life trying to get the very message that his mother Mary was singing about through to his followers.

These songs are about birth and change. They are all about paradigm shifts, shifts of power, that happen when God appears. ON EARTH.

Remember when Nicodemus visited Jesus and Jesus told him That unless he was born again from the spirit He would not **recognize** the kingdom of God? Being born from the spirit means letting your true source, God, be born within you as you **recognize** that you exist only because God calls you into existence and be born outwardly in your life as you bring heaven to earth through that relationship. Mary is our example.

Mary was just a young girl when she sang this song. Now, I know We love to imagine Mary as meek and mild, but that is not how she is portrayed in

Luke's account. Just a few verses earlier, Gabriel, the angel, shows up and greets Mary, and though Gabriel says "do not be afraid" there is no mention of Mary being afraid...but rather "troubled" or "bewildered" and then, this 13 year old girl asks Gabriel the angel how she could have a child when she has never had sex. We take this encounter for granted, but imagine the pluck it took for Mary to talk to an angel of GOD about sex. I mean she could have just said, "God's will be done" as she stood there in shock and amazement. And she certainly could have meekly said, "oh no...not me...I'm not worthy". But she did not. Actually, she had the nerve to say, "hold on there Gabriel, I'm not sure you understand this whole being human thing as much as you think you do". This young girl, Mary, was clearly a fearless, outspoken individual, not the meek little creature we often make her out to be. And that makes her statement, "I am the Lord's servant" much more powerful, and a foreshadow of Jesus' own words in the garden, "thy will be done".

All of these individual stories we have been looking at over the weeks have this common theme. Individuals who are the lowest on the social scale, Women, these women are moved by the spirit to acknowledge that the kingdom of God is one of revolution. And that the kingdom of God is one of community. And just to make sure that we don't miss the point, or shove it aside, one of these women happens to be the mother of Jesus. Mary, who intuitively understands that the salvation that her child will bring will be one that overturns power structures, and paradigms ON EARTH.

So what. What does this mean to us, here in Chester? What does this talk about birth and change have to do with us?

God is calling all of us to be born of the spirit, to let go and let God be God in us. To say, "Thy will be done". That's what Mary and Jesus have taught

us. To release our desire for control, protection and power. We are not supposed to be waiting to go to heaven, but rather working toward bringing heaven to earth. **Read from "The Modern Saints"** When we sink into our source, God, Tables will turn. Mindsets will shift. We will **recognize** the kingdom of God popping up, appearing in our lives. We will do what we can so that the poor will be taken care of, the hungry will be fed, the sick will get the health care they need, the marginalized will be included. We will love our neighbor as ourselves. we will not be easily offended. We will smile at strangers, we will listen more carefully to each other, we will build each other up, we will pray. Yes, we will **recognize** the kingdom of God appearing around us. We will **see** change. The downtrodden will be singing joyfully to God. And we will be standing side by side, With Naomi and Hannah and Mary, singing with them.