

09, Advent 4, (no SNC)

“For Me” Mary’s Magnificat, Luke 1: 36-56  
And Micah 5:2 (God’s “for me”)

INTRODUCTION:

- On the fourth Sunday of Advent we focus on God coming into the world as LOVE, and we’ll be exploring this theme as it’s reflected in 2 scriptures: firstly, a brief prophesy from Micah.
- Israel is rife with injustice and apostasy, but Micah says, God will raise up a just and righteous ruler, who surprisingly will come from the smallest and weakest tribe in Israel.
- The second scripture from Luke is known as Mary’s Song or The Magnificat. We see here the prophesy from Micah being fulfilled. God chooses a poor girl of no worldly significance to give birth to the one who will lead us into all righteousness.
- The thoughts that Mary expresses in her song are very similar to those expressed in the song of Hannah (1Samuel ch 2...) the idea of the poor and the weak being lifted up and the high and the mighty cast down.
- It’s the song we hear in one form or another throughout the scriptures- God’s great love for the poor, the powerless, the outcast, and God’s desire that WE have that same love in our own hearts.

Let us hear the word of God as it comes to us this morning.

“For me”

There’s a song we sometimes sing on Sunday night. The words go:

“Let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’ Let the poor say, ‘I am rich.’ Let the blind say, ‘I can see’; It’s what the Lord has done in me.”

It’s the song of Hannah who was barren, but God answered her prayers and she gave birth to Samuel, the first great prophet in Israel.

It’s the song of Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, barren and beyond child bearing years, who through the grace of God gives birth to John, who will be known as the Baptist. In Luke 1:25, Elizabeth says, “This is what the Lord has done for ME,” (R)

And it’s Mary’s song, “Surely”, she says, “All generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me”. “For ME”. What has the Lord done for me? For you? Do we know? Do we have a song to sing?

Matthew, a 15 year old Jamaican boy, could not yet read. He was a “behaviour problem” in class. I was his teacher. When he wasn’t trying to strangle me or some other kid, he would sing loudly his own original hymns.

I was neither musical nor at that time a Christian, but I saw in Matthew's faith a possibility for motivating him to learn to read. So when he invited me to his church, I accepted. Not knowing, of course, that his agenda was to bring me as a prize sinner to be saved.

The golden opportunity for this came when the congregation played a kind of musical chairs, where they moved around the room singing and when the music stopped, they shared in pairs "what the Lord has done for me".

And, I found myself looking, one after another, into the earnest face of someone sharing "what the Lord had done for them".

I can't say I REMEMBER anything that was said to me, but I do recall there was no pride or boasting of God's favor- but rather a sense of humility, gratitude, as each one shared how God had blessed them, rescued them in their poverty. How God had shown grace in their weakness, and the conviction that God could do the same for me!-

This is how God reaches the poor, the empty, the hungry- through the words and actions of those who have learned God's song, through their own poverty, emptiness and hunger.

Over the years I've heard many people speak of how God has blessed them. I am struck by how often their story involves their own helplessness, their grief, their weakness or wrong doing. Their sense of poverty, emptiness, or of being undeserving.

And yet they speak of blessing. Just as Jesus says, "You who are poor in spirit are blessed, you who mourn will be comforted, you who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied."

This is God's song - God's deep desire to pour God's Spirit into the empty places of this world, to lift up the lowly and the poor.

It's hard for many of us to think of ourselves as poor. We have so much materially, and most of the time we feel capable and strong. – But poverty- poverty of spirit comes to us all- life has a way of laying us low at some time or another.

Maybe even now, the pressures of the season leave some of us feeling scattered, even numb and empty, feeling we have no love to give, dreading Christmas festivities. And for those who grieve, Christmas can be an especially hard time, when joy is so far away.

It may help us to know that God's Spirit is brooding over the empty spaces in our lives, searching for a way in, longing to lift us up and to put a new song in our hearts.

We need just to bring our emptiness to God, and our hand will be grasped tightly by a hand that is pierced and scarred, and we will hear him say, "I know, I know your suffering. I've been there..Come. We'll get through this together. I'll show you the way."

This is what God was doing at the first Christmas: coming into our midst as one of us, loving us by coming alongside us, to experience everything that we experience. So we might know that God knows what it is to be frail and human, so we might trust God's greater plan for us all.

Two little words in the scripture this morning intrigue me, the words “For me”. Both Mary and Elizabeth sing of what God has done “for me”, for Mary, for Elizabeth, but in Micah, GOD uses the same words “for me”. God says, I will raise up a ruler “for me.” For God!

This ruler is being raised up for a much larger purpose. God is lifting up not just Mary, not just Elizabeth, not just one person, but desires that every little person in the world be lifted up, till the whole world is set on fire with God’s love.

It begins with the song of one person experiencing god’s love, but the purpose is for the whole world to join the choir in singing God’s song of justice and love. This is what Mary sings of:- a great movement of the Spirit- to lift up ALL the weak and the poor and to throw down the rich and the powerful-

A great churning and overturning of the power systems of the world, a movement for justice and peace, where love reigns in every heart.

God says, This is “For me” This is what I want. - This is GOD’S song, a song of love for the world, love for every little person in the world. A love that is not arrogant or condescending, but that meets us where we are.

A love epitomized in the Christmas story, where God Almighty, creator of the universe lays aside power and majesty and arrives in our midst, helpless and vulnerable, wrapped in the flesh of a human baby. And God says, see, this is the way the world will change, this is the way the world will be healed.

Not by power or by might, but by my Spirit says the Lord. You may have heard of Dale Lang, whose 17year old son was killed in a school shooting in Taber, Alberta. I heard him speak at a recent Restorative Justice Conference

The reason he is so often asked to speak is because of the extraordinary compassion he showed to the young man who killed his son. People always want to know how he could forgive so readily.

And his story is basically the song of all those barren women in scripture- He says, “It’s what the Lord has done in me”

His forgiveness, he said is not something he takes credit for and it didn’t begin when his son died. It began 22 years earlier. Out in the Arctic, he’d received news of the birth of his first child.

Out there on the ice, in the stillness and quiet he had an incredible sense of blessing a sense of wonder at life and for the first time he sensed the reality of God.

Sometime later he invited Christ into his life, not he says because he wanted or expected any change in his life, but more as a fire insurance. But God had God’s own plans and, he says, little by little his friends noticed changes in him.

A softness, an openness that wasn’t there before. All of which was preparing him it seems for that terrible moment, when his child was killed. By then he was sensitive to God’s voice. The thought

came to him that his son's killer was a very unhappy, disturbed young man. And he knew that this was God speaking.

He found he could not condemn the young man, his heart went out to him instead, and amazingly, he was able to reach out to him.

God has given Dale Lang a song to sing and many have been helped and blessed in hearing him speak. What God has done in him is intended for many more than himself.

We might wonder of course why it is that God's love is so often shown in the face of brokenness, suffering, emptiness, need? If God so loved the world, could God not have designed the world differently in the first place? Without suffering and brokenness?

Here's a true story: A woman had a vision in which she saw her mother who had died of cancer after a long period of suffering.

She found herself saying to her mother, "I'm sorry that you had to suffer so much". And her mother looked at her, surprised and said, "That's strange. I only remember the love".

Perhaps that's all we need to know.

That the love that came down at Christmas, that came in weakness and powerlessness, that love is stronger than any power in this world, stronger than death, and that love will put a new song in our hearts, so that we too may sing,

"Let the weak say I am strong', Let the poor say I am rich, Let the blind say I can see. It's what the Lord has done in me.

That we may sing this song for all the world to know the infinite love of God that reigns forever and forever.

To God be all the praise the honour and the glory.

Amen.