



LESSONS

MICAH 5:2-5A

LUKE 1:46B-55 (52) OR

PSALM 80:1-7 (7)

HEBREWS 10:5-10

LUKE 1:39-45 [46-55]

PRAYER OF THE DAY

STIR UP YOUR POWER,
LORD CHRIST, AND
COME. WITH YOUR
ABUNDANT GRACE AND
MIGHT, FREE US FROM THE
SIN THAT BINDS US, THAT
WE MAY RECEIVE YOU IN
JOY AND SERVE YOU
ALWAYS, FOR YOU LIVE
AND REIGN WITH THE
FATHER AND THE HOLY
SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW
AND FOREVER. AMEN.

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Liturgical Day: The Wednesday before the Fourth Sunday
of Advent

Date: December 16, 2009

Sermon Title: Magnificent Magnificat

*Mary's song of praise
my soul magnifies the Lord
a "great" reversal*

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are times when the reading of a Bible passage seems to be completely disconnected with the message of the text. It happens most often for me at weddings, when one of the lessons is from the 13th chapter of First Corinthians. You know which lesson I mean: Paul's lofty, poetic commentary on love. In most cases, the lesson is read by a sweet young person, with a soft, lovely voice. It makes this chapter sound like the text of one of those touching Hallmark greeting cards.

But it completely misses the point. Paul is writing to a group of Corinthian Christians, and he is hopping mad. Their gatherings have been marked by division and disunity, which Paul interprets as an affront to the Holy Spirit. And so, as though banging on his writing desk, and speaking through clenched teeth, he writes: "Love is patient! Love is kind! Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude! It does not insist on its own way! It is not irritable or resentful! It does not rejoice in wrongdoing!" I always find myself smiling at the disconnect between the sweet young thing who usually reads this lesson, and the angry apostle who wrote to try and reign in this congregation which had gone nearly out of control.

The other example of Biblical disconnect, for me, is this evening's text. We are in the first chapter of Luke, towards the very beginning of the story. The angel Gabriel has visited Zechariah, announcing that he and Elizabeth will raise a child who will prepare the people for the Lord. Zechariah responds in disbelief, so Gabriel strikes him mute, and Elizabeth becomes pregnant. In a parallel account, Gabriel visits Mary, announces that she and Joseph will raise a child who will become the Savior. Mary's initial response is almost identical to Zechariah's, but Gabriel reassures her, and tells her about Elizabeth. So Mary travels to visit her relative, greets her at the door, and Elizabeth's child leaps in the womb, which occasions this song of praise we call the Magnificat.

It is a touching scene. These two women; both having received messages from an angel; both carrying within themselves babies who will grow up and change the course of history; both leaning on each other for support in a strange and frightening, yet hopeful time. And the beauty of this moment is reflected in the first five verses of this song. Mary's spirit rejoices. God looks on her with favor. All generations call her blessed. God has done great things. God's name is holy and God's mercy is profound.

That is where the disconnect begins. Because all of a sudden, this lovely, gentle song turns into a pronouncement of social upheaval.

*The proud will be scattered.
The powerful brought down from their thrones.
The lowly lifted up.
The hungry filled with good things.
The rich sent away empty.*



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

What was, at least for a moment, a moving testimony to God's plan for the world's salvation, all

of a sudden turns into a prophetic announcement of God's intent to completely turn the order of this world on its head. Sweet, innocent, young Mary is the one to announce that in Jesus of Nazareth, God will work to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things; but also to scatter the proud, bring down the powerful from their thrones, and send the rich away empty.

Do you see the disconnect that I notice every Wednesday evening when we sing this song? Especially when we are using Holden Evening Prayer, the song is so quiet and soothing and lovely. Yet the message seems distressing, especially for those of us who live in the world of new automobiles, comfortable homes, full cupboards, high-speed internet, and cable television. We are tempted to think that these comforts are blessings from God, visited upon us because of our extraordinary faithfulness, or at least because of God's remarkable goodness. Entire religious systems have been created to support this kind of thinking – some even masquerading as Christian faith.

Mary knows better, and truly, so do we. Our God is not just a God of the wealthy and the prosperous, but is God of the whole world. And through these words from the mother of our Lord, we are called to use our wealth and power in ways that promote justice and righteousness in this world. We are to work with God in seeing that the lowly are lifted up, and the hungry are fed with good things. In other words: we are to be bold in our support of Covenant Cupboard, Lutheran Family Services, Habitat for Humanity, the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Selian Lutheran Hospital. We are to reach out in compassion to those in our neighborhoods and in our circles of friends who are in need. We are to be the presence of Christ in this world, not in order to appease God, or to assuage our own consciences, but simply because we are the church that follows Christ, and as such, we continue to do the work he began in this world. What it means to be the church that follows Christ, is to live with compassion and generosity and self-giving love as he did. That's the nature of it.

This morning, I received a letter from Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp. In that letter was a passage from a Bible study one of its former employees had written about a year ago. It included these words:

I love to serve, and have been incredibly blessed in the name of Jesus to serve all over the world. But I have learned a very valuable lesson throughout the years. I used to serve for me. I loved feeling good about helping others. It was a selfish kind of serving and going. I loved the thrill of the experience and the excitement. While these are great things, they eventually began to lose their appeal to me. Because I was serving for myself and not for God I began to lose interest and have a bad attitude at times. God has really changed my heart throughout the years, and has reminded me again and again that it is not about serving, it is about serving God. We have been called to a life of service not for ourselves, but for God. We serve to honor God...ⁱ

We serve one another and the world around us not to appease God, and not in the vain hope of what we'll get out of serving. We serve, because that is what it means to live in Christ's name. We serve because, as Mary understood so early on, God's desire is to meet the needs of those who are suffering. The lowly; the hungry; and as Jesus later would teach us: those who are hungry, unknown, naked, sick and imprisoned. Mary's Magnificat provides a glimpse into the life of faith. God has done great things. We rejoice, and realize how blessed we are. Then we join with God, as we pursue justice and righteousness in this world.

So let's sing this Magnificat together with Mary – this time enjoying the great work Marty Haugen has done in creating a melody that touches our hearts, but also being inspired by Mary's vision of what her son will teach us about being faithful to God. May both the melody we sing and the message we hear make our hearts sing. Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

Gospel Lesson; English Text: ⁱⁱ

^{1:39} In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the

ⁱ Former Assistant Director Dave Gunnlaugsson, quoted in a December 15, 2009 letter from Dave Jarvis (Executive Director of Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp – www.rainbowtrail.org).

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

⁴⁶ 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.” ⁱⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

^{1:39} Αναστᾶσα δὲ Μαριάμ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὴν ὄρεινὴν μετὰ σπουδῆς εἰς πόλιν Ἰούδα, ⁴⁰ καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ζαχαρίου καὶ ἠσπάσατο τὴν Ἐλισάβετ. ⁴¹ καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς κούσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας ἢ Ἐλισάβετ, ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου ἢ Ἐλισάβετ, ⁴² καὶ ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλη καὶ εἶπεν· εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν καὶ εὐλογημένος ὁ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας σου. ⁴³ καὶ πόθεν μοι τοῦτο να λθῆ ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου πρὸς ἐμέ; ⁴⁴ ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὡς ἐγένετο ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ ἀσπασμοῦ σου εἰς τὰ ὦτα μου, ἐσκίρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου. ⁴⁵ καὶ μακαρία ἡ πιστεύσασα τι σται τελείωσις τοῖς λελαλημένοις αὐτῇ παρὰ κυρίου. ⁴⁶ Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ· Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον, ⁴⁷ καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμα μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρι μου, ⁴⁸ ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπεινῶσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ. ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσιν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί, ⁴⁹ ὅτι ἐποίησεν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός. καὶ γιον τὸ νομα αὐτοῦ, ⁵⁰ καὶ τὸ λεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν. ⁵¹ Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν· ⁵² καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ψωσεν ταπεινοῦς, ⁵³ πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς. ⁵⁴ ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους, ⁵⁵ καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. ^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke 1:39-55, *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{iv} St. Luke 1:39-55, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).