



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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December 14, 2014
Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:46-55

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

“A Woman's Touch”

What kind of woman would it take to raise a child to become the leader of a revolutionary movement? We know that Jesus, as the son of God, embodied the characteristics of God in every way, but we forget that he also had a mother, a human mother, who taught him human characteristics as all mother's teach their children. What did Mary teach Jesus over those many years of his childhood and youth that seem to get forgotten in scripture.

Men may teach their sons skills, but women teach something different to their children. Women like Mary, who lived in a harsh world where each day it was difficult to put food on the table, surrounded by poverty and the harshness of a cold world, were like many young, uneducated women throughout the world even now. Mary was a woman who understood the need for compassion because she saw suffering all around her. I have to believe that she taught Jesus how to be a compassionate man.

In this song, even at the tender age of 12 or 13, it is evident that Mary had seen much of life. She had seen the injustice of the powerful over the powerless. She had seen the injustice of wealth over poverty. She lived in a world where the poor struggled to pay taxes to make the rich richer and if they could not, they were imprisoned. She lived in a world where hunger was the order of the day. Living in a world like this could have made Mary bitter and harsh, but instead we see a young woman who has an indomitable spirit, an enduring faith, an undaunted hope in a better world. Mary has faith in a world where the order is turned upside down.

Mary was not an educated girl, but certainly, in her home, she had heard about the God of mercy and knew that he was coming to save his people. It was God, the merciful, to whom Mary's song is sung.

God's mercy is extended to those who are hungry, those who are penitent,

those who are humble, and those who stand before God with empty hands. It is those who are filled with the riches they obtain by their own merit, those who are proud, those who do not trust in the mercy of God who are turned away. It is out of God's mercy that the angel is sent to Mary – to tell her that she is to bear the one who will revolutionize society and turn things completely upside down. In the new order it will be the Pharisees who are rejected and the Tax Collectors who are welcomed. In the new order it is the condition of the heart that matters, not the size of the wallet. In this new order unmarried girls find themselves pregnant and not only ask why but how. The angel answers, “With God all things are possible.” And the young girl not only believes but lifts her heart in a song of thanksgiving and praise.

It is only when we are humble of heart and poor in spirit that we can offer ourselves to the God of mercy as Mary did. It is only when we can become lowly servants as this young, uneducated girl did, that God will indeed look on us with favor. When we can proclaim with Mary the greatness of the Lord then we, too, will be fed with spiritual food for our hunger and our souls will be lifted up. When we have the faith of Mary that one is coming who will turn the world on its head, then we can accept the invitation to live into a new order where the promises of God are offered even to all, frail and unworthy as we may be. Like all of us, Mary was a sinner in need of salvation and she calls out in this song to God, her savior.

Who is this young girl to have such great faith in the power of the coming revolution? Who is this young girl to be chosen to not only bear but also nurture and teach the revolutionary who will bring about God's great reversal? She no longer a girl but a woman, a strong and a passionate woman.

She is a woman and she brings to the situation a woman's touch. This is not about decorating the stable or preparing a feast for the shepherds. She brings the kind of woman's touch that is not arrogant or demanding, but calming and reassuring. She brings a woman's touch for loving and teaching her child about the God of mercy. After the birth of Jesus we hear little more about Joseph, but Mary is with her son to the end.

We might assume that Jesus knows everything about God. In his divinity this is true, but in his humanity he needs this woman in his life to teach him human goodness. He needs her there to raise his awareness of the people all around him who are unjustly treated and harmed by the powers of this world. Jesus needs his mother. His Jewish mother.

There is a scene in the book “Frannie and Zooey” by J.D. Salinger about another Jewish mother. Frannie, the daughter, has been attempting to explore religious mysticism, and she comes home in a terrible state of confusion. Her mother tries to comfort her as only a Jewish mother can, by offering a cup of

chicken soup. But Frannie will not accept this offering from her mother. Her brother intervenes and tells her that she understands nothing about religion. He says, "I'll tell you one thing, Frannie. If it's the religious life you want, you ought to know that you are missing out on every single religious action that's going on in this house. You don't have sense enough to drink when someone brings you a cup of consecrated chicken soup, which is the only kind of chicken soup that Mom ever brings to anybody."

In her every action for those precious years of Jesus' childhood, Mary was feeding him consecrated chicken soup. In her household she was practicing the religion of love. And she was teaching him to be a revolutionary. Amen.