

SINGING FROM THE HEART
Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11 and Luke 1: 46-55
December 13, 2020... Third Sunday of Advent
Eastminster Presbyterian Church

Scott Peck, a Native American novelist penned these words: "The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers."

What follows is a commentary of a biblical reality that seems to be missing from the times in which we live. He calls it a generational outlook. It is a way of thinking that had people not fixating upon their own generation, but always thinking of past and future generations. It was a out drawing wisdom and experience from the past, learning from it, then passing a larger collection of wisdom and experience to the next generation. In our modern language we might call it mentorship.

If we listened carefully to Mary's words, we witnessed firsthand a holy passing on for generations to come: Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed. She ends by placing all of Israel within a generational continuum as she remembers the promise God "made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever and praises a God who "has brought down the powerful from their thrones"

For Mary, this mighty act was worth "singing from the heart" because not only did she need to remember, she is called to sing hope for future generations. She has been raised in, not the lap of luxury, but lowliness. She has watched her people serve as slaves, suffer, keep silence and yet, in all of that, they find joy in their God. And in her song, the Magnificat, a magnifying, she also reminds us of humility, that of Jesus and the need for ours.

Mary's words sing of a God who overshadows not only her, young girl that she is, but overshadows all the great and all the powerful and the wealthy, and then raises up the marginalized and the weak and the poor. The *Magnificat* blessedly turns the world upside down. Mary sings of a great reversal, this need for humility versus power, her words sing of need for an attitude adjustment.

For all of our formal worship, our fancy words, and our attempts at proclaiming God's love in Jesus, the truth is our Lord is going to show up in ways, and places and people we never imagined and surprise us all!

In the words of today' passage, God will "exalt those of low degree" and "fill the hungry with good things." Then God will "scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts," and "put down the mighty from their seats," and send the "rich away empty."

This is not an indictment against those with or without financial or physical means. It is about what the attitude of the heart is with those resources. We all know people who are rich in things and poor in spirit and those who are poor in things and rich in spirit. Our souls magnify, lift up the Lord when the humility of our doing is in sync with the humility of our being.

Luke's gospel and Luke's Jesus understand the interwoven relationship between *literal wealth* and the *spiritual temptation* that seem to come with wealth – the temptation to a sense of self-sufficiency, the temptation to pride, even arrogance. Even if us relatively secure people are not too proud or arrogant, the *temptation* for us is much greater than it is for people who *know* on a daily basis how much they need other people and how much they need God.

Our culture nudges us toward a self-sufficiency that can ultimately imagine that we have no real need for anything but *me*. But this is the truth that I think we all know: the things we strive for that bring self-sufficiency can lead us to believe ourselves to be so much an island that we have no need for anyone, and most of all, no need for God. The very things we strive for, the very things we compete for and work long hours for, sweet as they may be, can end up disconnecting us from God and distancing us from other people if the attitudes of our hearts are not in the right place. If our hearts are not singing with joy because we have found a peace and contentment that the world cannot give, only God.

So how does God ever get through to the likes of us, people for whom the very things we struggle to achieve become spiritual barriers? The good news is that with God all things are possible. For most of us, sooner or later, the depth and the mystery of life, align our attitudes with our need for God's saving grace in Jesus. There are times when the realization that "there is more than me opens our lives to the moving and shaping of the Spirit. Sooner or later we often come face-to-face with the fact that what the world names success cannot altogether satisfy the deepest hunger.

If you find yourself in a place of uncomfortable or unhappy or unfulfilled as we move closer to the birth of the Lord and deeper in the world's Christmas season, do not fear, instead do as Mary did. Embrace that something better, something more faithful, something more joyful awaits you. That is what Mary did, by faith alone. She allowed the Spirit of the Lord to walk her out of the ruts, helped her find a truer answer to the world's needs, showed her a different way of living. Through her lowly, humble, undramatic living, God brought salvation into the world and never again have we been without hope. That is worth singing from the heart.

I end with this from theologian Henri Nouwen, "the root of joy is gratefulness. It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful. Mary was taught to live in the joy of the Lord. She has passed that on to us. Going forward into the new year, I pray that no matter what our situation in life is, we will never turn down an opportunity to be a messenger of the Lord, allowing the Spirit, like Mary, to sing a song of joy through us for generations to come to hear, embrace and keep passing on!

