**Songs Luke 1:39-55 December 19 2021**

**This past week I presided at a funeral for a friend of mine. He died suddenly alone at home of a heart attack the previous week. At only 71 years old, it hit close to home. His ex-wife and daughters have been associated with my church in Saskatchewan and I’ve talked to him over the years, during weddings, funerals and blessing of children that I have officiated.**

**And there have been times I just bumped into him on the street.**

**So, when his daughters approached me to do the funeral, I was privileged to be asked.**

**But on the other hand, I didn’t feel like I really known him that well to do his service justice.**

**That is always a challenge for a pastor when you are called out of the blue to do a funeral. Coming from a smaller community, it happens from time to time. People scramble to find an officiant, and although they may not be that religious, their loved one may have been a church goer at one time, so they want a funeral.**

**One of the things I’ve learned over the years, is to try to get someone who knew the person to do the eulogy or share their memories, to make up my lack of really knowing the person.**

**So was the case at Reuben’s funeral.**

**His brother Dan was the first person to speak before my portion of the service.**

**Now I knew that Reuben had a great faith in God, and that his mother had been a pastor. And I did get the impression from talking to his daughters that various songs of faith, were an important part of his life.**

**But Dan, designed his whole eulogy around the songs that Reuben loved.**

**The one story that will stick with me for a long time, is the time Reuben as a young child came into the church service singing the hymn “In The Garden” and as he walked down the main aisle of the church he would stop and look at various members who were sitting there and direct certain words towards them.**

**I’ll always have that image in my mind from now on when I sing those words:**

**And He walks with me, and He talks with me,**

**And He tells me I am His own,**

**And the joy we share as we tarry there,**

**None other has ever known.**

**How about you, do you have those songs trigger your story of faith, or picture freedom/salvation for you?**

**I’m sure you are probably aware that there are many such songs in the Bible, where we see verses and words, they were intended to be sung.**

**In fact, in the book of Luke which is the Gospel we are reading during this cycle of the lectionary, there are four songs:**

**The first is found in Luke 1:67-79** is known as Zechariah’s Song which some of us read on the second Sunday of Advent.

Zechariah had been silent since the Angel Gabriel first prophesied that his wife Elizabeth would bear them a son in her old age.

Because he did not believe, he was unable to speak. However, when their son was circumcised, Zechariah indicated that the baby’s name should be John, even though there was no-one in their family with that name.

From that moment on, he was able to speak again. The first thing he does is praise God, singing of God’s goodness and faithfulness. He explains how John will have a role to play in the salvation plan of God.

**The second is the Angels’ Song of Luke 2:13-14**

An angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds who are out in the fields. He brings good news that a saviour has been born today who will be the Messiah. After telling the shepherds where to find the baby, a multitude of angels appear praising God and singing:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

This is a message that is delivered to a group of people considered outcasts in society. It is therefore significant that God’s message came to those who were poor and needy and not those who were well off. Jesus was born for those who were in need and not those who were self sufficient.

**The next is Simeon’s Song Luke 2:29-32:**

His song takes place when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple for the purification rites of circumcision required by the Law.

Simeon is a righteous man on whom the Holy Spirit rests. Simeon had been waiting for this day for a long time. God had promised him that he would not die until he saw the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit shows him the identity of the baby Jesus.

He understands that this baby is the one they have all been waiting for who would be a light of revelation to the Gentiles.

Simeon sings the words:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

Now you may have noticed I missed one of the most important songs of salvation in the book of Luke.

That really is the Gospel text for my sermon today, Mary’s song also known as the Magnificat. **This same song that Heber mentions in Speaking of Life**

Let’s read the passage from together:

**@@@@@@@@@@@@@Slides 2-6**

**Luke 1:39-55 (ESV)**

**Mary Visits Elizabeth**

**39In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

**44For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”**

**Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat**

**46And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47    and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
    For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
    and holy is his name.  
50And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.  
51He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.  
54He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
55as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”**

**David Lose in his commentary for Advent 4 writing about this song of Mary says:**

*Why, one might wonder, all these songs?*

*Because singing is an act of resistance. That’s not to say that all singing is, of course. Sometimes it’s an act of joy and sometimes of camaraderie, but it’s also an act of resistance.*

*The African American slaves knew this.*

*When they sang their spirituals they were both praising God and protesting the masters who locked them out of worship but couldn’t keep them out of the promise of deliverance of the Bible.*

*And the civil rights leaders knew this, too, singing songs like “We Shall Overcome,” when so many in the society didn’t give them a chance to advance their cause of justice, let alone triumph.*

*The protesters in Leipzig East Germany in 1989 new this as well.*

*While that element sometimes gets overlooked in the histories of the “velvet revolution,” it’s striking to note that for several months preceding the fall of the Berlin wall, the citizens of Leipzig gathered on Monday evenings by candlelight around St. Nikolai church – the church where Bach composed so many of his cantatas – to sing, and over two months their numbers grew from a little more than a thousand people to more than three hundred thousand, over half the citizens of the city, singing songs of hope and protest and justice, until their song shook the powers of their nation and changed the world.*

*(Later, when someone asked one of the officers of the*Stasi*, the East German secret police, why they did not crush this protest like they had so many others, the officer replied, “We had no contingency plan for song.”!)*

Now I wouldn’t go as far as saying Mary’s song is an act of resistance, but perhaps in the ears of the Roman Authorities it could be taken that way.

It certainly, offers hope, rescue and deliverance.

Here is how Eugene Peterson renders Mary’s song:

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**And Mary said,**

**I’m bursting with God-news;  
    I’m dancing the song of my Savior God.  
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—  
    I’m the most fortunate woman on earth!  
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,  
    the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.  
His mercy flows in wave after wave  
    on those who are in awe before him.  
He bared his arm and showed his strength,  
    scattered the bluffing braggarts.  
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,  
    pulled victims out of the mud.  
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;  
    the callous rich were left out in the cold.  
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;  
    he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.  
It’s exactly what he promised,  
    beginning with Abraham and right up to now.**

Speaking about this rendering of Mary’s song, Rolf Jacobson says:

*I love Eugene Peterson’s creative translation of Mary’s psalm, especially the first verse: “I’m bursting with God-news, I’m dancing the song of my Savior God.”*

*It is a wonderful image—the pregnant Mary absolutely bursting with the good news: mercy for the faithful who revere God, strength for the weak who rely on God, honor for those who have been shamed but look to God, food for the hungry who turn to God, and help for Israel and those who have trusted God’s ancient promises.*

*The gospel is good news precisely because it both promises and delivers the sort of transformative*newness*that broken-hearted people need: mercy, forgiveness, strength, honor, food, help, salvation, redemption, reconciliation, holiness, light, guidance, knowledge of God and on and on.*

**Isn’t that what we all need to hear? That message never gets old, does it? Each generation needs to hear it.**

**During the time of Mary, the Jewish people were looking for such salvation weren’t they?**

**They didn’t realize what type of saviour God was going to send them, and what type of kingdom would overturn the empire they were living under.**

**This momentous event is illustrated in the song The Canticle of Turning or the World Is About To Turn by Rory Cooney performed during this pandemic by members of the group A New Community Church.**

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**Play video.**

**I think this song illustrates the momentous meaning of this Song of Mary, which we will celebrate this upcoming weekend, when we remember the coming of God in our human plane.**

**Or as Eugene Peterson writes when he renders** John 1:14:

**14The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.**

**God moved into the neighbourhood and the world hasn’t been the same since.**

**Before I conclude, I want to share one more song that illustrates what that means, and actually mentions all the themes for each of the four Sundays of advent: hope, peace, joy, love.**

**When Love Came Down to Earth by Stuart Townend:**

**@@@@@@@@@@ Slide 14**

**Play Video: When Love Came Down to Earth**

**Certainly, the World has turned!**

**Prayer:**