

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2017

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 1:46-55

FOR REFLECTION

“Infuse your life with action. Don't wait for it to happen. Make it happen. Make your own future. Make your own hope. Make your own love. And whatever your beliefs, honor your creator, not by passively waiting for grace to come down from upon high, but by doing what you can to make grace happen... yourself, right now, right down here on Earth.”

~ Bradley Whitford, American Actor (b.1959)

Love: Mary

G-d loves me. It was clear the night he came to woo me on bended knee. I had waited past the usual age of engagement, claiming myself for my SELF, daring life to challenge my choices. And G-d did not ask to marry me, thank G-d. He told me what he found in me – was what he desired in the mother of his child.

The G-d of Grace and Justice wanted to combine my Grace and sense of Social Justice with his – so together we could redeem the soul of Israel. Now THAT's a reason to bear children. I could not do it for less. And, by the way, G-d may have come across rather powerfully (hard for him not to)– but he waited for my consent before acting. There was no sexual assault here – as with so many women I know. (I count myself lucky.) And G-d knew what he was doing choosing me – no meek and mild for him.

I have travelled more than other girls who settled down far sooner than need be. I want to see the world, visit other nations. One reason I have decided to marry Joseph is not to settle down but because he promised to take me on adventures – maybe even to Egypt. To see the pyramids that my ancestors helped to build would be fascinating. If we had ancestry.com, I'd be out in the world visiting all the places my ancestors have lived – including the Garden of Eden. The world is large; I want to see it all.

People tend to think that pregnant women are frail somehow. We are the exact opposite. We have to be strong to bear children – and go through the birthing process – oh joy. You should see the strength and courage of women in this world – screaming and crying and laughing their way into motherhood. It is an experience I carry in my mind daily these days.

I've been walking the hills around Nazareth like crazy – stir-crazy. So, this journey to visit Elizabeth is just the thing to tide me over – until Joseph and I make the next trip to Bethlehem – thank you census!

I love this world so much. And it breaks my heart that human beings can be so cruel to each other – when our time here is so short – and there is so much beauty and joy and adventure to be had. Even without the Roman Empire crushing our bodies and souls, our own leaders have a history of screwing things up.

With my station in life – definitely in the lower regions of the 99 percent – and female in a patriarchal society – it is unlikely that I would ever be anointed *Mashiach*. But it would be an excellent position to be in if I could give BIRTH to *Mashiach* – Messiah – king and fixer-up-er of our human condition. I would be content with that. Maybe he'd let me help...

I know I shouldn't be saying these things around Zechariah, my cousin's husband. As a temple priest he is given the responsibility to uphold ancient traditions and laws – and basically police our souls. Okay, that's a bit harsh. But he can be rather dense when it comes to G-d's intentions – tempted to thwart his wife's plan for John (her soon to be son) – blind to the fact that the people under his care were out in the street protesting SOMETHING while he burned incense and made offerings. No wonder G-d struck him dumb.

But I shouldn't be unkind. I just get frustrated when people I love are on the wrong side of our political realities. I think you know what I mean.

I love my cousin so much – and the fact that her baby recognized mine – womb to womb – gives me hope that the two of them might be able to bring G-d's intentions into existence – maybe in our lifetimes – maybe not – but it's worth a try. “Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...” That is my manifesto and that will be my lullaby and prayer until my kid can sing it himself.

Like Hannah – like Sarah and Elizabeth – I have high hopes for my kid and for the world. Some people have called me “fierce” and “untamed.” Well, they're right. I love this world fiercely. And I will fight to the death to be free woman – to free my people from occupation forces – and from narrow ideas that thwart human thriving.

As G-d is my witness – and my collaborator – and the father of my child – this world will be a better place when I'm done with it.

May each of you give birth to G-d in this season of darkness and light...

May love and beauty and justice triumph...

G-d bless us every one.....

Luke 1:46-55

46 And Mary said,
‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
48 for he has looked with favour 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.’

No More Lying About Mary December 3, 2015 by Nancy Rockwell

Advent 4 - Advent, and the same old lies about Mary are slipping over pulpits and out of parish letters, Christmas cards, public prayers, TV holiday movies, and late-night comics' jokes.

The subjugation of Mary, the maligning of her as meek, mild, and mindless, has been harmful to millions.

Hiding within the wonder of Christmas are a thousand years of doctrinal female subjugation, doctrines that, like tinsel, are dripped all over the season of Christmas. In the midst of the celebration of Wonderful Life, these malicious ideas keep women from feeling empowered, invited to be strong, and urged by God to imagine new ways to live, as Mary of Nazareth did, who mothered God's redemption of the human world.

Luke's is the only gospel in which Mary's story appears, and in his account, there is nothing submissive nor immature about her. According to Luke, the Angel approached her with words of great honor: Hail Mary, full of grace. Many artists paint the angel kneeling, in recognition of the honor given to her. The angel is explicit; the honor is for the grace that is distinctly hers. This is a courtship scene. the angel is wooing her, on bended knee, a suitor – not a constable bringing a decree.

It is Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. And what is this grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions

about justice. Not submissive meekness. Grace is not submission. And the power of God is never meek.

Yes, she is startled by the presence of the angel. So were Gideon, Jacob, Jonah, and the shepherds of Bethlehem, to name a few, they who, like Mary, questioned the angel in wonder, doubt, and even resistance. They are noted for their reluctance. Why not she? What sort of greeting is this? she asked. And the angel obliged her with an explanation. Later, she challenged the angel: How shall this happen to me, when I have no husband? God chose a spunky woman.

Many women in biblical stories appear in domestic settings. Sarah is in her tent, baking cakes. Rachel is drawing water at the well. Bathsheba is taking a bath. Martha is fussing around in the kitchen. The woman who lost a coin is sweeping the house. But with Mary, there is no evidence of any domestic work on her part. We never find her cooking, cleaning, washing up. The evidence offered us is her love of adventure. What we find her doing, over and over, is traveling, in journeys that involve risks and an element of danger.

Her recitation of the Magnificat is a political manifesto, delivered fairly publicly, in the home of an official temple priest, who is married to her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant, with John the Baptist. In Mary's manifesto there is evidence of deep thought, strong conviction, and a good deal of political savvy.

None of this gibes with the idea that she is a young teenage girl. The Greek word Luke uses for virgin is an unusual one, a very specific word that means she has not yet born a child. Its precise meaning does not indicate sexual innocence. So, let's be clear: the focus is on her uterus. The state of her hymen is not at issue here.

Luke does not assign her a specific age. And to insist she is under sixteen is to ascribe to God a pedophilic attraction to underage women. Such details twist Mary's story and burden Christian women with a sense of selfishness if they postpone childbearing, a psychic demand to put childbearing first in their hearts, for God who seems to want nothing from them but pregnancy.

Mary is unmarried when the angel comes. The angel's invitation and her independent decision tell us Mary does not need permission of clergy – or her parents – to become pregnant. God knows Mary owns her own body. And there is no shame in her decision. Mary is good news for unwed mothers everywhere.

Mary, wanted by God, according to the angel, for her bold, independent, adventuresome spirit, decides to bear a holy child – for a bold agenda: to bring the mighty down from their thrones; to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, to fill the hungry with good things and send the rich empty away. This is Mary: well-spoken, wise, gritty.

She gives birth in a barn, lies down animals, and welcomes weathered shepherds in the middle of the night. She is determined, not domestic; free, not foolish; holy, not helpless; strong, not submissive. She beckons women everywhere to speak out for God's justice, which is waiting to be born into this world.

We are all called to be mothers of God – for God is always waiting to be born. – Meister Eckart, 13th c. German mystic.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/no-more-lying-about-mary/#KTmd2ZjWdsEwGGrB.01>