

Specific Peace

Luke 1:46-55

I know how this time of year can bring added pressure to our schedules and calendars. I am glad you chose to carve out time for worship. It is such an important element of spiritual health.

Bullying brunch yesterday/Moose Lake Christmas service

We sometimes talk about Advent as a preparation time. Most people think it is a preparation time for Christmas – and it is – but it is so much more than that. We get a sense of the richness of this preparation time as we listen to this song from Mary in our scripture reading called the Magnificat. I think most of us understand that there was not someone following Mary around writing down what she said. This song was composed by the early church as part of connecting the story of Mary's life with the larger faith tradition. It has echoes of the stories of Hannah and Sarah from the Jewish scriptures. We also see some examples of the ways Mary was still trapped by her religious tradition. One way to read this text is that if Mary is to fulfill her role in God's ways, she must be "used" by God in the same way that women are often used by men to accomplish their desired outcomes. Maybe we can hear our own songs in Mary's song – the ways in which we are still caught in the snares of our own thinking, our own traditions, our own assumptions. We seek God's transformation but we don't completely understand what that transformation will look like or how it will change us or what it is calling us to do and be. The danger for us is the same as the danger that Mary faced. If she accepts the common wisdom of her day about the meaning of the role she is to play in the divine drama unfolding, then she limits the transformation that is available to her. If she assumes that the only reason that any one could praise her faith is because she is "used" by God to produce a baby, then she has once more succumbed to the misogynist trap others have set. But if she can see in this encounter that she is being asked to model what living by faith looks like – living faithfully when we don't have all the answers or step-by-step directions – then Mary's life becomes a model for any of us seeking to make our Advent journey transformational.

Being a Christian is not simply about making my life different. It is about making the world a better place for all of us. Following Jesus is not simply so I can reserve my spot in heaven. It is to reduce the amount of hell that people have to experience while on earth. It is not about making everyone believe the same things. It is making room for the voices and experiences and paths that might enrich all of us if we have the freedom to share them without fear.

In the story the angel told Mary to “fear not.” Fear is the most common response to the changes that transformation brings. [It is too often the place where everything stops.](#) We hear the call of the Spirit of Peace, but when it comes to making a step into the unknown our fear stops us. Mary’s story is remarkable, in my reading of it, because she was willing to step out of so many assumptions others would have placed on her. Think about what it would mean for the early church to proclaim that an unwed peasant woman was to be the mother of the transformation of the world. She was no princess. She had no political power. She was not from an influential family. She did not have an education or pedigree or privilege. Yet she was willing to engage the grace of God’s presence and face the criticism and challenges this embodiment would bring.

This is a great story for those of us who have ever lived on the fringe. We reject the will of the powerful to use us. Instead we want to be engaged with, struggled with, and embraced by a respect that allows our story to become part of the larger story. And we want to become transformed by the message so that we allow the stories of those who are different from us to become part of our story.

We sometimes think of our story simply as the GLBTQ story. But it is so much more. We have Brian’s story of passionate faith and commitment to outreach becoming part of our story. He is hosting an Outreach gathering in the chapel after worship where I hope you will stop by and hear some of the amazing things planned and get to know this new amazing part of our story. Arlett’s story of hospitality and caring for her family and friends so abundantly that she sometimes puts herself at risk is part of our story. Frank, living his life in that chair struggling to have his voice count and not letting physical ability be the

defining element of who he is. That is part of our story. There are so many others who people outside this place wouldn't think would be part of our story like Joe and DJ, the men up at Moose Lake, the students from Catholic high schools needing safe space or the folks coming through recovery. Just as our Advent journey in the Spirit of Peace is about so much more than Christmas, our story as a community of faith is about so much more than we sometimes assume.

Mary's song is the song of our hearts as well. With all the uncertainty and fury and anger and disbelief that swirled around her, she found specific peace in knowing that [God would take what she had to offer and make something wonderful out of it](#). That's our song too. That's our story.

Sources:

www.homileticsonline.com The Stuff Crisis, December 2010.

Out in Scripture, www.religion@hrc.org Advent 2, 2010.