

Mary's Song of Praise November 26, 2017

Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor 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."
56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

This is the first time I have done a sermon on this particular Scripture. A journey through Bible takes us to the announcement of two very important births followed by the meeting of the mothers to be. Now we see the expression of praise from one of them. We should always praise God, in good times and bad. Praise is a joyful expression of thanksgiving.

I like the way that Luke is written, it is personal and egalitarian (all inclusive). The Gospel of Luke shows Jesus came to seek out and save the lost. The Gospel starts with a greeting to a man with a Gentile name. This is significant because it shows us that the Gospel is meant to include the Gentiles. God's plan of salvation is all inclusive. God's divine love and mercy is for all people - the lost, the poor, the lowly, and even the tax collectors, and sinners. Luke exalts women and shows God's love is for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

The story of the Angel visiting Mary is a deeply moving story. It is one of the most deeply moving of all biblical stories. The Angel Gabriel delivered the news that she would give birth to Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the Most High. The young virgin's response is noteworthy. She is not in a state of shock and disbelief. She did not have an attitude like "pick someone else, I'm not good enough" or an attitude of woe saying "woe is me I can't handle the stress and the heartache." Her response is "I am your servant, let it be according to your word." This is a model of faithful obedience.

I want to make sure we understand the perspective of Mary's situation. Elizabeth bore reproach of bareness for many years because every married woman was expected to produce a male child. Failure to do so was shameful. Well, Mary's situation is a much more serious than that. In fact it is extremely dangerous. Young Mary is pregnant and unwed. Sexual relations while betrothed was classified as adultery. According to Jewish law the unfaithful wife was stoned to death. So, Mary faces capital punishment. However, her relative Elizabeth has divine insight and tells Mary that she is blessed because she has been chosen to be the mother of the Lord and she is blessed because she has believed the word of God.

Mary trusts in the divine. She trusts the divine insight of Elizabeth and she trusts the encounter she had with the angel. Though facing the potential consequences of the unknown, dangerous, and life threatening situation, she expresses this paradox through praise to God. Mary praises God for the favor that has been bestowed upon her. Obviously she is devoted. She attributes her blessings to God and expresses thanks to God, and offers praise to God. Mary

recognizes that God is the source of salvation. Mary recognizes herself as a humble servant and realizes that this event is so great that everyone in the future will call her blessed. This is all because of the greatness of God and the glory of the Son. She highlights the characteristics of God as being merciful and strong. She addresses a reversal of fortunes. God scatters the proud and brings down the powerful, lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry, and sends the rich away empty.

The lesson for us is what we learn from Mary's words and example. From Mary's words we learn God's order is a reversal of fortunes. Humanity prefers to view an economy that is marked by scarcity, with competition, hoarding, and not sharing the resources that God has bestowed upon us. This is replaced by an economy of generosity where all have enough. Those who are hungry now get to enjoy good things. Those that are rich do not get to add to their riches. The powerful no longer get to exercise power over others. Whereas it is the rich and powerful that abuse others - it is the others that are blessed. This is done through God's social transformation. And now, in the New Testament, with the advent of Christ, God's order has begun.

From Mary's example we learn that we should praise God. Mary faced uncertainty, she was unwed and pregnant and could be stoned to death. But her faith is much stronger than her fear. Instead of focusing on her fears, or anxiety and stress, she focused on the glory of God. As a person devoted to God, she praised God, she didn't go through the what if's of the unknown consequences of her situation.

The lesson for us is not the content of Mary's praise. The lesson for us is what she does in her situation. For us looking back we can see clearly; it is easy for us to know the outcome of what she faced. But at the time Mary faced an extremely difficult situation. She faced it with trust & confidence in the Lord. She faced it with faith and she expressed her faith through praise. The lesson for us is that whenever you are faced with life challenges, and life is always presenting us with challenges, trust in the Lord. Live a life of faith. Praise be to God.