

“The People’s Magnificat”

December 22, 2024

Based on Luke 1:46b-55, Mary Sings Out Her Soul

When the women of the Bible start to sing, it turns out, the powers that be in this world better watch out!

When the prophet Miriam starts to sing in the Book of Exodus, seas part, chariots fail, and those who were formerly enslaved dance on foot through the mud and the muck to a spiritual and social freedom on the other side.

When Hannah, the pregnant mother of the prophet Samuel, starts to sing in the first book named after her son, the infertile woman *gives birth to seven*, the poor are raised from the dust, the needy are lifted from the garbage heap, and all of them are seated with honor among the nobility.

And when Mary, the pregnant mother of Jesus, starts to sing, in our Lesson from Luke today, the proud are scattered, the hungry are filled, and the rich are sent away empty.

Yes, when the women of the Bible start to sing, the powers that be in this world better watch out.

Common throughout these songs of biblical women - and indeed, the entire biblical book of songs we call The Psalms - is a description of a God who champions those who are poor and powerless, outcast and lonely, on the edge and wounded by power gone amok. These songs employ the Hebrew word *anawim* as a kind of catch-all phrase for the folks who are most desperate for social and spiritual liberation. That same word, translated into Greek, applies to Mary as she sings, now translated into English as *the lowly state of this servant*.

Which is to say that Mary counts herself among the *anawim*. Quite likely physically poor, from Nazareth, a town in Galilee that has known social and political struggle.

Mary, herself, would have grown up with the words of the songs of Miriam and Deborah and Hannah close to her heart. God frees the slaves, Mary would have sung, God sweeps away the once-mighty, Mary would have sung, God raises up the poor and needy, Mary would have sung, and God is doing it again through little old me!

It turns out, as the words of Mary’s own song pour forth from her heart and her soul, they merge with the words from the heart and soul of all who are *anawim*, from all of the generations before and from all the generations to come, that God not only *will* turn the world around but that, in some mysterious mystical and even literal way, God *has already done it* ... and the rest of us are just trying to catch up to it.

To be sure, the song of Mary - the song of all of the biblical women, it turns out - is not necessarily *good news* to any among us for whom the world as it is currently constructed actually *works*. Empires fall in Mary’s

Magnificat. The rich are sent away empty in Mary's *Magnificat*. The world is turned upside in Mary's *Magnificat*, in order to get it right side back up so that nobody will be *anawim* again.

This has *already happened*, Mary insists in her song. And yet the struggle goes on. Mary's pregnancy concludes with a forced migration and a *show your papers* indifference. Mary's childbirth endures homelessness. Mary's early child-rearing takes place as a family of refugees, still *anawim*, still navigating in faith through a world that emphatically does not work for them.

The social and spiritual liberation Mary proclaims *already accomplished* in the early days of her pregnancy do not rescue her or her child or even her husband from this fate. Instead, this social and spiritual liberation that is somehow *already*, is not quite yet in its fullness, strengthens Mary to endure and overcome and accompany other *anawim* through the struggles of their own.

It does the same for us as we sing her song today.

Mary's *Magnificat* is not a call to hold on to hope that everything will be okay *for US*, getting back to whatever we think normal should be. Mary's *Magnificat* is a re-orienting of the powers that be for the sake of those who are *anawim*. It is a call to solidarity *with* the *anawim*, who worship at The Community Cup in Martinsburg, and shop at The Shepherdstown Food Pantry right here in our own town, and gather in community with the Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance, and perhaps even populate our congregation right here in this sanctuary.

Mary's *Magnificat* is a call to stitch the broken heart of the world back together, as our poet describes, *with compassion and wire* overflowing with light, we can hold on to the sure and certain hope that future generations will call *us* blessed as we sing with the women of the Bible of a God who is strength and mercy and justice and peace.

And the powers that be in this world begin to tremble!