

Feast of Mary, Mother of God

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Alex Aivars

August 5, 2018

We've done something a little different today with the Gospel. Instead of me reading the text, we have had some lovely singer's sing the text. This is because the text for today is thought to have been sung by Mary. We know this because it models almost exactly a song in the Old Testament called the "Song of Hannah."

What Mary sings is a song of praise. Mary is praising God and rejoicing for what the baby in her womb will do after he is born. But after these joyful words, the song takes a different tone. It begins talking about [social?] justice. The proud of heart will be scattered. The mighty will be cast out from their thrones, while the lowly will be raised up. The hungry will be fed with good things, while the rich will go hungry. It then ends with hope, that God will indeed fulfill God's promise to protect God's children.

Mary sings the Magnificat in response to what her relative Elizabeth tells her. Elizabeth says that the child in Mary's womb is blessed and their Lord. The words printed in your bulletin are Mary's response to this.

Mary was talking about her current condition and those of the people around her. Mary and Joseph were peasants, not rich by any means. A reversal of their

fortunes would be a great thing, where they would now be rich. And then their oppressors would be punished for what they had done and be made poor. God would be doing something new.

As I have done in other sermons here at Wicker Park Lutheran Church, I love using song lyrics in my sermons. There's something about words together with music that speaks to me at a very deep level. For me, music is the primary way that I connect to God. It's through the creative art of music where I feel most connected to God.

I consider myself a creative person, and nowhere is this more evident than in my sermon prep. When I first started out writing sermons, I was very much tied to a strict process. First I did my research on a text. Then I wrote my sermon. There was no mixing of the two processes. I did first things first, and second things second. But I soon became to feel that my process was lacking. I realized that it sapped my creativity. So I changed my process. I would now describe my process as messy. And I love it. If in my research, I come up with a great opener, I immediately write that part down. Or if I think of a great story as I do more research, I write it down. And if further in my research, I get an idea or theme to go with, I write that down as well. I go back forth between researching and writing my sermon, until I get to a point where I'm happy with the sermon (or I might as well be honest, I run out of time). Although I feel like most pastors will tell you that there is always something more they would have liked to work on in their sermon, if they just had one more hour.

I see our God as a creative God as well. It was God who created our world. It was God who created manna for the Israelites to eat as they were walking through the desert for 40 years. It was God who was doing a new thing with Jesus, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And God continues to be creative and remake creation and do new things. Being made new isn't always easy, and can at times be painful.

There was once a young pine tree, growing on the side of a mountain, that did not know how much longer it could stay standing. It seemed like for months that it had been fighting off disease and insects. It had patches of branches that were brown and brittle. The insects were starting to bore deeper into its body. The fungus was starting to erode its roots away.

The other trees had noticed that the young pine had not grown like it should. Whenever they would ask, "Is that fungus growing there?" or "Did I just see an insect crawling under your bark?" the young pine would deny it and give some very good explanation. But inside, the young pine knew it was dying.

It was about the day that the young pine came to this realization that things got worse. The tallest trees saw it first. From the bottom of the mountain there was a growing gray cloud of smoke. It wasn't long before the tallest trees were telling the others that they could see flickers of orange and red jutting out from under the thick blanket of black and gray smoke.

Soon the fire reached the pine grove. First the dry underbrush on the ground and the layer of fallen, dry pine needles burst into flames. The fire then rose up, tree by tree, jumping from dry branch to dry branch.

The young pine felt the red hot sting as the fire jumped into its branches. The pain was unbearable. All the young pine could do was endure it, crackling and snapping in anguish as its branches turned to flame and then glowed red with heat. Its dry needles were gone in seconds. The dry branches and some of the not so dry ones burst into flame and were consumed under the heat. Only the greenest of branches and needles were able to withstand the intense heat.

Looking down at its trunk, it could see that the insect hole patches had caught fire. One by one the insects tried to escape; with a sizzle, each one perished. The fungus could not stand the heat, and when it fell off the tree, it burned completely away.

When it was all over, none of the trees spoke. The evergreen pine grove was now full of bare trees, with a branch here and there of green needles that had survived, but had curled from the heat. A few days later the rains came. They misted over the grove, and dowsed all the embers and washed away the charcoal, soot, and ashes.

With the return of the rains, it didn't take long for the ground cover to quickly grow back. The young pine began to grow again too. It still had large scars from the fire, but there were no more insects or fungus. As the young pine grew, new limbs

started to grow out around the side where its branches had burned away. Its other limbs grew new green needles that absorbed the sunlight. The young pine matured and grew tall and wide with new branches on every side. It had become even better and stronger than before the fire.

Remaking creation is hard work. But this is God's promise to us in Jesus. Death will not be the final answer. Brokenness and pain will not be the final answer. We will be made new in Christ. We will become a new creation.

People of Wicker Park Lutheran Church, Mary's song comes to us in the creative art of music. I see myself as a creative person, and I see our God as creative as well. God is making all of us new. At times it can be painful, but that pain will not be the final word. We will be made new in Christ. We will become a new creation.