

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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August 14, 2022

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our savior and our supplier. Amen.

- For those of you who heard my sermon last week, I have a bit of a confession to make
 - One of the central, foundational ideas of what I preached 7 days ago was Mary's song from the first chapter of Luke, also known as the Magnificat
 - I said that all of Jesus' actions and teachings must be examined through the lens of Mary's song.
 - That her prophetic utterance foretold what God would accomplish through the incarnate Christ with such certainty that she sang about these things yet to come as though they had already taken place.
 - That God would bring food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, abundance to the meek, and would send those with an overabundance away, such that all folks might flourish in the Kin-dom of God that is continuously breaking into this world.

- It was, in my most humbled and unbiased of opinions, a good sermon, deftly juggling theological concepts and ideas and hopefully landing with them in a way that resonated with those who heard it.
- However, my confession is this:
 - I wrote that sermon without looking ahead to this week's readings, and failed to notice that we would be celebrating the feast day of Mary Mother of our Lord, with the Magnificat as the central gospel text for me to preach on.
- So, if this sermon sounds like I'm a broken record, it's because in some ways, I am, and in other ways, I lacked foresight.
- But, I am still here, ready to rise to the occasion and, if I'm being completely transparent and honest, I'm thrilled to have another excuse to preach on Mary's song.
 - Truly, I would preach on it every week if I could without the risk of my messages growing stale and predictable.
- But, before we get to the central passage from Luke, I want to take some time dwelling in and exploring our two other texts because there is richness and goodness to be found within their words as well.
- We begin with Isaiah
 - One of many, many prophetic books from the Old Testament wherein individuals, prophets, were given the word of God upon their lips for the purpose and intent of speaking God's truth to God's people.
 - Usually this involved telling the people of Israel that they were not living in accordance with God's covenant and that God

would soon be bringing punishment and wrath upon them if they continued to shirk their covenantal promises to God.

- Today's particular reading comes from the 61st chapter of Isaiah, and it is largely understood to have been recorded after Israel was conquered by the Babylonian empire and living in exile, scattered across the land, no longer within the bounds of the land God promised to Abraham's descendants.
 - Which is why, I find it so striking that the imagery used towards the end of this passage all about joy, promise, and restoration is that of a Garden.
 - "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations."
- What struck me about this particular passage from the prophet is how, in the midst of extreme displacement, unsettlement, and uncertainty, the prophecy lands on an image of growth, fertility, and nourishment.
 - And how radical it is, how incredibly faithful to look at a world turned on its head, an entire nation of people displaced from their ancestral home and to say:
 - God is not done here. Let us rejoice, celebrate, and praise because our God is one of growth. Our God tends to the garden, amidst the dirt, grime, and muck, and God brings forth beautiful things even in the midst of uncertain challenges.

- What a word for us to hear today.
- What a word indeed when we hear this concept echoed through Paul's letter to the church in Galatia
 - This garden of righteous goodness is not exclusive or only for the few, Paul argues. This world of generative goodness and praise is for all people because we have been adopted into God's family.
 - This is an important and necessary element of all of Paul's letters and indeed his life as a missionary in the early days of the Jesus movement.
 - There were a great many questions and anxieties among the people about who was allowed in, and who was to be kept out of the Kin-dom of God.
 - People got hung up on the fact that they were not born and baptized Jews so would they still benefit from the goodness that God promises?
 - And Paul's answer is confident, almost to the point of being defiant:
 - Nobody is excluded from God's love and the new reality God is bringing forth into the world.
 - Regardless of your birthright and your heritage, God has adopted all people into the fold through Jesus which means that ALL people now receive their familial inheritance.
 - The gift of the garden, this generative space is for all to dwell within, to tend, and to maintain.

- To counteract the turmoil and deconstruction of the world at large is to confidently bask in our Godly inheritance.
 - Filled with the spirit we are no longer beholden to this world and its unjust machinations, we are children of God! And as children we also receive our inheritance, the Holy Spirit that also lived in Christ.
- Which, finally, brings us to the subject matter of today's feast day: Mary, the mother of our Lord, and the song she sang when she learned she would be the one to mother and raise God in human form.
 - Forgive me if I'm coming across as excitable, it's because I am and these readings are so gorgeous in their messaging that I'm getting just a little giddy.
- If it wasn't clear in last week's sermon, I adore this passage of scripture.
 - Not just for its poetic beauty, which is absolutely valid, but also for the ways in which it grounds the story of Jesus in human existence.
 - It is through Mary's body that God enters this world in physical existence, which in itself is radical. Our God takes on flesh, blood, human emotion and Mary is the catalyst through which it takes place.
 - There is a Greek word that has been used to refer to Mary throughout the centuries: *Theotokos* which means "God-bearer"
 - Mary literally bears God into this world by birthing Jesus into existence.

- Mary's life revealed the presence of God incarnate, it revealed God's presence among the humble and poor
 - And her song spelled out what God would accomplish through Jesus, yes, but also through those who encountered and followed his teachings.
- In the Gospel of Luke, where most of the gospel readings have come from this year of the lectionary cycle, Jesus spends a great deal of time teaching and preaching on what the Kingdom of God is like.
 - And, Mary gives us a sort of foreshadowed view of this
 - Typically, I tend to focus on the more justice-oriented aspect of the Magnificat when I preach on it
 - Specifically highlighting the themes of tearing down tyrants, sending the rich and powerful away empty-handed, and scattering the proud away.
 - And, while I think it's always important to highlight and remember the ways that Mary knew just how radical and world-changing Jesus' life would be,
 - Today I'm struck by how Mary also sings about goodness and promise.
- There is prophecy here, yes and there is also joy, praise, growth, nourishment, and promise
 - The coming kin-dom of God is a world oriented to God's justice, yes, but it is also a place where people have what they need and can coexist peacefully and sustainably.

- God is certainly in the business of bringing down systems and cycles of injustice, but never without the promise of growing a new thing in its place
 - The kingdom of God is like a Garden
 - This is the vision of the world we are adopted into
 - This is the work the spirit brings forth in us
 - This was Mary's vision
- Mary is *theotokos* "the god-bearer"
 - And for us, as adopted children of God, we receive the inheritance of the Kin-dom as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit, breathed into our bodies that we might rise to new life every day.
 - And so, remembering this inheritance, may we all embody the spirit.
May we all emulate Mary and bear God in ourselves in our own way
 - And by the grace of God may we all work to grow a new world of love and promise together.
 - Amen.