

**LIGHT IN OUR DARKNESS**  
Randall Tremba  
December 15, 2013  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

**Luke 1:47-55**

My soul magnifies you, O Lord, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior, for you have looked with favor on the lowliness of your servant. You have brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. You have filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

**Isaiah 35:1-10**

The desert shall blossom like the rose; it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

**Matthew 11:2-11**

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one? Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

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The second week of Advent was good to our dogs. This past Thursday, Lucy and Rita, found the remains of a gutted deer in the woods and dragged the skin—with head attached—back to our house. I suppose it was meant as a gift to Paula and me. After all, those dogs know who "butters their bread."

But I must tell you: we were less than grateful, especially when they began snarling and snapping at each other for sole right to that foul, fetid, putrid prize. I don't think we can accuse them of greed or cruelty. After all, dogs will be dogs no matter how many Santa sweaters or reindeer antlers we put on them.

No matter how much we domesticate a dog, it remains a beast. In the heat of the moment, survival instincts flare up.

Which is not much different than humans.

We can dress up in tuxedos and gowns but we still have a lot of the beast in us. It's part of our evolutionary legacy. After all, we arose out of the kill-or-be-killed animal world and quickly formed ourselves into tribes, us against them. In the heat of the moment, we quickly revert to greed and cruelty—survival at any cost.

But there's more to us than that. Humans bring a new twist to the 4.5 billion-year long tale of evolution.

We aspire to be kind, just and peaceful. We aspire to create a world never yet seen on this planet, a world of peace and love—the lion and lamb together and a little child leading them—the end of "us against them," of prey and predator.

That dream is an aching in our hearts, a longing for something yet to fully come or yet to be fully revealed. It seems that something has been given the human species that is both burden and promise.

But what if that new world is beyond our powers?

What if we can't control the outcome of evolution?

What if we can only cooperate with the inner spirit of evolution?

What if all we can do is say YES or NO to certain possibilities before us?

Once upon a time, in the dark of night, in a world gripped by fear, Mary said: *Let it be—* and then she sang her heart out.

*My soul magnifies you, O Lord, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior, for you have looked with favor on the lowliness of your servant. You have brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. You have filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*

I'm guessing Mary's own mother taught her that song which is not unlike the song of Mary's Hebrew namesake, her great ancestor Miriam.

Miriam—the sister of Moses. Miriam—strong, wily and brave. Miriam—protecting baby Moses in the bulrushes. Miriam—sparing the Hebrew slaves their savior, their liberator.

Mary's namesake Miriam—the sister of Moses. Her tale is told in the olden book of Exodus.

*When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.*

*And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for God is highly exalted. The horse and its rider the LORD has hurled into the sea."*

Free at last. Thank God, we are free at last. But if you know that story, you know it took 400 years for freedom to arrive.

We watch. We wait. We take heart. And now and then the world gets turned right. Now and then justice and freedom prevail. It's like trusting something you can't see.

Two centuries later, when the world was dark and gloomy again, Mariam's song became the song of Hannah, mother of Samuel.

*My heart exults in the Lord; My mouth derides my enemies. The bows of the mighty are broken. The rich are hungry, the hungry are full. God raises up the poor from the dust. (1 Samuel 2)*

Mariam's song became Hannah's song. And then a thousand year's later Hannah's song became Mary's song which is the song of many sisters and mothers before and after. It's a song of hope for a world turned right—Pharaoh's army dead in the sea. Pharaoh's army crushed. All the violent shot and killed until there are no more.

But that, as it turns out, doesn't create a new world.

Pharaoh's army drowned in the sea but other armies rose up and slaughtered Miriam's people again and again. Mary herself had seen what Roman swords, spears and crosses could do. She knew her own child could be crucified and her own heart pierced by a sword.

Yet still, in the darkness, in a world gripped by fear, she sang her song of hope. Mary trusted something she couldn't see. Maybe, just maybe another way would be found. Maybe the human species would evolve Emmanuel.

One hundred sixty five years ago, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony dreamed of a new world for America, where women would have equal rights.

One hundred years ago Gandhi dreamed of a new world for India.

Sixty years ago Nelson Mandela dreamed of a new South Africa.

Fifty years ago Martin Luther King dreamed of a new world for America.

Forty years ago outside an inn named Stonewall in Greenwich Village, LGBT persons dreamed of a new world for America.

One year ago yesterday, our nation was shocked by the cold-blooded slaughter of school children and teachers in Newtown, CT. Today we dream of a new world where children are safe. Today we are trusting something we can't see.

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HYMN: There Is a Longing