

BLESSED MARY
Randall Tremba
December 14, 2014
Third Sunday of Advent
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Luke 1:47-55

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, who has looked with favor on my lowliness.

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Magnificat by Joy Cowley

My soul sings in gratitude.
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.
The light of the Holy One is within me
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.
This goes deeper than human thinking.
I am filled with awe at Love
whose only condition is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud
for they have no room for it
The strong and self-sufficient ones
don't have this awareness.

But those who know their emptiness
can rejoice in Love's fullness.
It's the Love that we are made for
the reason for our being.
It fills our inmost heart space
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.

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It was a dark and gloomy time and Mary had every reason to despair but instead she kept hope alive. And thus we call her and all such people, blessed.

Blessed be Gandhi. Blessed be Martin. Blessed be Malala. Blessed be all who keep hope alive. And may that be us. May that be you.

Hope is not the same as optimism.

Optimism is based on sight. Hope is based on faith.

Optimism relies on facts. Hope relies on a promise.

Optimism is sustained by evidence. Hope is sustained by clues.

Optimism needs much. Hope needs little.

Optimism is in the mind. Hope is in the heart.

Optimism is individualistic. Hope is communal.

*People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. **Henri Nouwen***

Mary had every reason to despair but she kept hope alive. And thus we call her and all such people, blessed.

Fifty years ago this past week, Dec. 10, 1964, Martin Luther King accepted the Nobel Peace prize with these words.

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of humankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the view that humankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and unity can never become a reality. I refuse to accept despair.

Mary lived in troubling times and so did Martin Luther King. But then who doesn't?

If you don't feel the troubles of the world, wake up! You're not paying attention.

If you don't feel the anguish of Sandy Hook parents today, wake up! You're not paying attention.

If you don't feel the anguish of young black men, you're not paying attention.

If you don't feel the anguish of beleaguered police, you're not paying attention.

If you don't feel the anguish of raped women, you're not paying attention.

If you don't feel the anguish of tortured bodies, of hungry bellies, of desperate refugees, of children under the shadow of drones, or of soldiers trapped in hell, wake up! You're not paying attention.

Mary was paying attention. She was wide awake and she had reasons to despair. She and her people lived under the brutal heel of the Roman Empire—raped, shackled, beaten, crucified mercilessly.

The particulars of her time are not ours. But the experience is nearly the same. The powers of this world crush many and leave them broken. Sometimes it's an occupying military force. Sometimes it's slavery including slavery to debt or addictions or our own tyrannical ego that won't let us be or our obsession in getting ahead or changing the world all by ourselves.

Who or what will save us? What will save the peoples and nations of the world?

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness but they choose not to live in it.

Mary chose not to live in it. She believed in a power greater than herself.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, who has looked with favor on my lowliness. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is that name.

The Holy One has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, and lifted up the lowly. The Holy One has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty, in keeping with the promise made to our ancestors and their children forever.

Mary believed in a power greater than herself and greater than the empire that tortured her and her people. And if you connect the dots in her and our tradition that "power" translates into "love."

God is love and those who abide in love abide in God.

In case you hadn't heard: the social expression of love is justice—the world turned round and upside down. The rich humbled. The poor exalted. The hungry fed. The

homeless sheltered. The vulnerable protected. The excluded welcomed. Equal opportunity for all and a helping hand for those without bootstraps or even boots.

Mary had reason to despair but she cherished a promise in her heart, a vision of a world with new possibilities not yet realized.

Helen Keller was once asked if there was anything worse than being blind. She replied, "Yes there is: having no vision."

This past Wednesday, Dec. 10, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani young woman received the Nobel Peace prize. When she was 14 years old a gunman tried to kill her because of her advocacy of education for girls. She was mortally wounded but eventually recovered, only to go back to her work.

She accepted the prize with these words.

After they tried to kill me, I had two options — one was to remain silent and wait to be killed. And the second was to speak up and then be killed. I chose the second. I decided to speak up. They tried to stop us but neither their ideas nor their bullets could win.

I tell my story not because it is unique but because it is not. It is the story of many girls. This award is not just for me. It is for those forgotten children who want education. It is for those frightened children who want peace. It is for those voiceless children who want change. I am here to stand up for their rights, to raise their voice. This is not a time to pity them.

Mary herself was a young girl. She had every reason to despair but she kept hope alive. She chose to live in the light. It wasn't much light. But it was enough.

This is the third Sunday of Advent. Today is a day to join our voices with Malala, Martin and Mary.

We are about to sing Mary's song. Please, let her words, her hope, faith and vision be your own!! And may you be blessed as Mary.

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Hymn 100

"My Soul Cries Out with a Joyful Sound"