

“A Reflection on Mary’s Song”

Luke 1:39-55

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Mary’s song, known to us as The Magnificat, is the center piece of the pre-natal time in the Christmas story. An angel visits Mary; announces the miracle that’s about to happen; and tells her not to be afraid. Mary ponders all this in her heart, and she begins to sing a song of praise.

Mary is a commoner, a young woman with low expectations. She hasn’t been to college. She doesn’t have a stock portfolio. She has, at best, a minimum wage job. She describes herself as a handmaiden of low estate. She’s like Second-hand Rose from Second Avenue. She wears hand-me-down dresses. She’s never had a piano lesson. Never been to a fancy restaurant where they serve a sorbet in between each of the seven courses!

Yet, God chooses HER to be the mother of the Savior of the world. God chooses to use HER to be an instrument of peace in the world. God chooses HER to reveal to the world God’s unconditional love.

This is a primal example of how God works. God hatches a grand idea for reconciling the creation to its Creator; and then selects the humblest person in town to carry out the mission. It comes as no surprise that the child is born in a stable out behind an inn, or that the first witnesses are lowly shepherds. The scene at the birth is the epitome of humility. The One who comes to transform the hearts of the most powerful people on earth arrives without drum roll or fanfare, without crown or credentials; arrives with a simple mission: to announce that love casts out fear.

Mary sings this song to celebrate how it is that God works to establish peace. God works through the lives of common people like you and me; people like Mary.

I'd like everybody here this morning to depart after the service saying to yourself, "God can use even me as an instrument of peace."

You may or may not have ever thought of yourself as a peacemaker. Mary certainly hadn't thought of herself in that way. She hadn't imagined that God could use an average human being such as herself. The angel helps her to imagine it, to imagine being a peacemaker.

I believe the angels are calling South Church, now, and into the year 2016, to be an instrument of peace; each of us individually, and all of us as a church family. A peacemaker's work is to chase fear away by using the gift of love. Love is our raw material. Love is what we have to offer. Love, not fear, is what makes the world go around. And everybody here has a supply of love.

In our little town of Dupree, South Dakota, we had 551 residents. The sign out on highway 212 said, "Welcome to Dupree" 550 residents and one old grouch. Well, I happened to know who that old grouch was. Art Jones. But I got to know Art Jones and found that even he had a few ounces of love to offer. Even the old grouch found a way to chase fear away. From the parsonage window, one day, I watched him intervene in a tense moment and chase two bullies down the road. Even old Art refused to let fear take charge.

Last fall, I was playing golf in the church golf outing to raise money for our local fuel bank. My foursome was about 170 yards from the green. I looked into my bag for a club that would carry the ball 170 yards. The five iron wouldn't do it.

The four iron wouldn't get us there, neither would the seven. I simply didn't have what was needed.

It's an empty feeling when you don't have the right tool or the right instrument or in this case the right golf club to complete the mission. But disciples of Jesus Christ always have a reservoir of love, always have a cistern of love to tap into, always have a capacity to bring love to bear on a situation where fear has gained a foothold.

As Mary sang her song, she was being transformed into an instrument of peace. The Magnificat still has that effect on people. Whenever I listen to it sung, I feel God is molding me again into the image of one who labors for peace.

Thirty years after the birth in Bethlehem, Jesus emerged onto the scene as a powerful preacher. In his very first sermon he announced, "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called the sons and daughters of God." Sisters and brothers, my wildest prayer is that we be known in our village as God's sons and daughters, as the ones who confront fear with love, as the ones who usher in the day of peace. In the greatest of hope, I say Amen!