

“A Reflection on Love”

Luke 1:46-55

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Mary’s Song, known to us as The Magnificat, strikes me as a song that can only be sung when one comes to the realization, “I am loved.” Mary’s Song is intimate. It reveals the difference it makes to know she is loved. In her mind, she had been a nobody. But now that she knows she is loved; she is a somebody! So, I wanted to offer a brief reflection on the real difference it makes when we come to our senses and become conscious of the truth that we are loved by our Creator. Even if everyone else on the planet regards us as a nobody, God regards us as a somebody; even if everyone else turns away from us, God’s love is reliable and permanent.

To know you are loved makes all the difference! This is one way of understanding the Christmas story. I sometimes think of the Incarnation of God in the following fantasy: Once upon a time, God was thinking out loud, “I wonder if all those people I’ve made know how much I love them?” An angel, fluttering around nearby, overhearing God’s musing, says to God, “ why don’t you go down to earth, make yourself like them, you know, human! That would be an awesome display of your love for the human creatures.” And God replied, “It would?” And the angel said, “It would. Place yourself in their shoes; walk in their moccasins, see things from the human point of view; and then they will know beyond a doubt that you love them.” And God said, “I’ll do it.”

Whenever anyone makes the effort to see things from your point of view, you know you are loved. Whenever anyone makes the effort to come to meet you where you are and hear your side of the story, you know you are loved.

I believe God came into our world in the person of Jesus to understand fully what it means to be human: what it means to be vulnerable; what it means to hunger; what it means to suffer; what it means to feel all the feelings that we feel. In this way, God hopes we will know we are loved. And when we know we are loved, it makes all the difference! It lets us feel we are somebody.

It made all the difference to Mary. It gave her confidence to be a mother and a spouse. It gave her courage to be the woman God made her to be. It gave her the self-esteem she needed to hold her head up high and not be afraid of what the community was saying about her. Knowing she was loved by God, Mary stepped into her future ready to face whatever must be faced.

So, when I think of a church celebrating Christmas, the first thing that comes to mind is our responsibility to love each other, to love our neighbors, to love, as Mr. Rogers used to say, “the people that you meet each day.” And the way to love people is to do what God did in Bethlehem: to do whatever it takes to find out what it’s like to be that other person. What is it like to be a veteran of a foreign war now living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? What is it like to live with Asperser’s Syndrome? What is it like to have cancer? What is it like to break up with a girl friend? What is it like to have grown up in the Great Depression?

On many occasions, I tried to love my father in this way. I’d ask him to tell me what it was like to be a Captain in the U.S. Army in World War Two liberating one of the camps, wondering if you’ll come home alive to see your wife and first-born child. Like so many soldiers, he was more than reluctant to reveal what that was like. I had to get him in just the right mood, at just the right time, maybe after a gin and tonic, to get him to open up. As difficult as it was for my dad to find words to tell those stories, I believe with all my heart that he knew I was trying to love him, to understand him, to see things from his perspective.

And I choose to believe that at some level of his being he knew he was being loved, and that that knowing made a difference.

The birth of Jesus into the human race is all about God wanting to love us; wanting to know us; wanting to care about us. This is why we light the candle of love today. This is why we pull out all the stops on Christmas morning. Please, please, please know you are loved. Amen.