“My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
   Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
   and holy is his name;
50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
   from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
   he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
   and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things
   and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
   in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
   to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Focus Statement: God’s Kin-dom resonates with Joy!

The High School auditorium resonates with joy. Over 750 people are gathered in person with another few hundred online - over one thousand people, including more that 20 folks from South Church - here for the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance Power Summit on December 7,
2022. It’s been more than three years since we’ve come together in this way.

The stories we are hearing, the issues we have come together to address are heavy. Many of us gathered here have had first hand experience in the struggles: with mental health care access, with gun violence, searching for an affordable place to live, worrying about the environment and the effects of pollution and climate change, finding good schools for ourselves and/or our kids. The people gathered come from a spectrum of faith traditions, neighborhoods, cultures, races, genders, and socioeconomic conditions. Yet there is no pressure here to be like anyone but ourselves. And. Despite the many differences - maybe BECAUSE of the many differences, there is this sense that we are all in this together. And even as we hold space for the heartbreaking stories that are shared, even as we challenge one another to take risks and leave our comfort zones behind so that we can make a positive impact that will be felt for generations to come, even as we name the struggles we have come to address: the joy is bouncing off the walls, echoing through our hearts, magnifying our spirits as, one after another or all together we say a subversive YES to the invitations that are being extended: will you do what it takes to make this region, this world, these lives better? Yes, yes, yes - and we begin to find, that even as we step away from the things we thought were bringing us comfort, we find that the real comfort, the true comfort, is knowing that we are connected, one to another, and that the Spirit of God is working within and around us.
Two thousand years earlier, and 5,554 miles away, another subversive yes was spoken by a young Jewish girl living in a small, poor fishing town in Galilee. She received a scandalous invitation from the angel Gabriel, asking her to go against everything she’d been taught was her duty in order to do the one thing that is required of any of us that seek to follow God: say Yes to God’s invitation when it comes. “Let it be with me according to your word.” She answered. Her resonant Yes would echo through millennia, and bring into the world a man who would turn it upside down, who would change the course of human history again and again. Yes, yes, yes, let it be with me according to your word! Despite the risks, despite what anyone else might think of me, despite the certain discomfort and pain. Yes. Let me be a part of your Great Dream for this world, Holy one. Let my soul magnify your Spirit from generation to generation.

Mary of Nazareth had the audacity to believe the impossible and to co-conspire with the Holy Spirit to carry God’s Love, God’s Joy, God’s Shalom God’s Salvation in her womb.

In the text we heard today, we catch up with Mary some time after she has said Yes to God’s outrageous request and we hear her singing with her cousin, Elizabeth. Mary is riffing off an even older song, voiced before the time of King David by Hannah, the mother of the last judge and the first prophet, Samuel. Samuel will be the one who anoints King David, and David’s lineage will eventually lead to the child that Mary is carrying, Jesus. Hannah’s song declares the power of God who lifts up the lowly and brings down the mighty, who delivers the poor and the needy from
suffering and sets them at table with princes. Now, hundreds of years after Hannah, Mary sings her own song of deliverance and joy.

My soul magnifies the Lord, she sings. And I can picture it, feel it: the glory of God resonating, reflecting, reverberating within the chambers of Mary’s courageous soul, within her heart that says Yes! Even when the odds are stacked against her. God’s glory, grace, and power are magnified as they align with that Holy Yes and the shock waves of that moment resonate across millennia and surround us even now, resonant joy that longs to echo within the depths of our own courageous souls, to join with our own Holy and Subversive Yes! This is the music God calls us to from generation to generation. That we may see Mary’s blessedness and join her - and her son, Jesus, in the work of God’s Kin-dom.

In the last few years, I have been fortunate to forge a sisterhood with three Glastonbury clergy as we’ve worked together to address food insecurity here in Glastonbury - eventually forming an organization called Glastonbury Links Together. GLT is a collaboration between several local faith communities, town social services, Glastonbury Schools, and civic organizations to, according to the organization’s mission, “change what it means to be poor in Glastonbury.” My “soul sisters” and I were recently remembering the moment back in March of 2020, when it all began for us. We had reached out to the school superintendent and committed to help feed kids and families that depended upon the school’s free and reduced lunch program while the school waited for state and federal funding and policy adjustments that would enable them to provide food for families even while the schools were closed. In a matter of days, with
the assistance of our congregations, the Glastonbury Citizen, and social media, we had organized a food drive at St. Mark’s Lutheran church. We were blown away by the amount of people that showed up to bring food and to organize it into bags to distribute to families. It was right at the start of the pandemic, our community was shrouded with uncertainty and anxiety - and yet, in that parking lot, on that cool and sunny day, the joy was palpable. In the mass quantities of food donations, in the hands that loaded bags and loaded them into bins to be distributed, in the connections that were being made with friends and strangers - we were being reminded that no matter what uncertainties lie ahead, we were connected, one to another, and that the Spirit of Love was working in and around us. We gave away over 500 bags of food over the course of the next couple of weeks. On top of that, area farmers brought food to share from their farms. Some of our area businesses brought sandwiches to give out or provided boxes, trucks, and materials to store and transport the food and between distribution days. Our community said a Holy Yes to God’s invitation to show up for one another, to participate together in the work of God’s Kin-dom.

The work is as small as a loving smile for someone who is lonely, a warm meal for a neighbor who is hungry, a dollar tossed into the offering plate with the hope of helping someone in need. And it’s as large as speaking truth to power with the voice of a thousand faithful people who have the audacity to believe that we can make the world better when we join forces with God and one another. It’s as simple as coming to church to pray and connect with the Spirit of God and as complicated as allowing that Spirit to shine a spotlight on the things that require our attention,
our repentance, our forgiveness. The work will pull us out of what we think will comfort us and into the beauty of connection and of joy.

The work is as easy and as difficult as saying “Yes” to God’s ongoing invitation to harmonize with Mary as she sings:

My Soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my savior!

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