



St Mary the Virgin, Sapperton: October 25, 2015

Luke 1:46-55

Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

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Over thirty years ago, some teenagers found a quotation in a magazine and painted it on the side of folk singer Pete Seeger's barn. The four-foot high letters said this, "I am done with big things and great things, great institutions and big success; and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular forces that creep from individual to individual like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monument of (human) pride."

Today in honouring the 150th anniversary of St. Mary's Church, we honour one of the most powerful spokespersons for those tiny, invisible forces, those forces that, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monument of (human) pride. Her name is Mary, and she is the Mother of Jesus.

Known by many exalted names in the tradition—queen of heaven, seat of wisdom, cause of our joy, help of Christians—when we first meet Mary in Luke's Gospel, she is no more than a poor peasant teenager. Invisible, unimportant and lowly, she herself cannot fathom why she would be the one who would have found favour with the God, why she would be the one asked to give her assent to bearing the Holy Child of the Most High.

But she does give her assent which leads to our Gospel for today. In that Gospel, Mary proclaims to her cousin Elizabeth and to us that in being chosen by God, all those invisible to the world—all the poor, all the hungry, all the powerless—have been lifted up. And right along with this, Mary proclaims that all who are big and great in the world—the wealthy, the well-fed and the powerful—have been cast down. "Our God is a God of reversal," she joyfully sings out for us all to hear, for our God is done "with big things and great things, great institutions and big success" and is "for those tiny, invisible, molecular forces that creep from individual to individual like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monument of (human) pride."

And so today, you and I, both as individuals and as the people of the parish of St. Mary the Virgin, you and I, on this grand occasion, are again challenged to live out the reversal that Mary proclaims—you and I are called to cast down the notion that our lives will be secured by wealth and power and, instead, to lean on a God who reveals his riches to us when we have very little, who fills us when we are hungry, who lifts us up when we are lowly, who comes to us in power when we reach the end of our own power.

Yes, today is our day to explore what it will mean to be like her, what it will be like to let go of everything in us that is expert, and above it all, and to stand empty-handed, open, with our two feet planted humbly on the earth, ready to declare that it is through our very empty-handedness, through our acknowledgment of what we don't know, through our humble availability to God and to one another, that God will come to us, will magnify and will lift us up and will be born anew in our lives so that new life can flow through us to a world that needs it.

And, of course, today is this same day for this parish, a parish working hard to redevelop itself: It is a day to claim once again that, as grand as its life in the past has been, its life for the future must be found in being like Mary: willing to say "yes" to the call of God no matter how strange that call may seem; willing to nurture a space within itself for the presence of God to live rather chasing after what is big, great and successful; willing to look to the small thing, the lowly thing as something worthy of being lifted up, and lastly, willing to foster relationships with the invisible, the lowly, the hungry and the powerless in that this is who Mary actually was.

And so this morning, where in your own life or in the life of this parish is God's great reversal way of doing things going on? Where are great things and big things showing themselves to be unreliable? Where is God lifting up to you tiny people or things, invisible people or things, seemingly powerless people or things in order to bring something new into being? And finally, who are the lowly, the hungry, the powerless that you are called to be in relationship with, to walk with, to serve

Today we will be confirming and reaffirming three people into the Anglican Church of Canada: Karen Baron, Florence Erwin and Linda Hale. Part of what we will be doing in this confirmation and reaffirmation is inviting each of them to become more of who they already are as baptized Christian people: to play their own part in God's action of reversal in the world as expressed in the renewal of our baptismal promises. This kind of a life, a life that many of us here this morning share, is not meant to be a kind of dutiful drudgery, but instead is meant to give us the same joy that Mary herself experienced as she uttered the words of our Gospel for this morning. Preacher John Buchanan put it this way: "The (words of the) Magnificat teach a simple truth: You cannot receive a gift unless you have a place for it. You cannot learn anything if you think you know it all. You can't enjoy beauty unless there is a place in you that yearns for it. You can't receive love unless you know there is a place in you that is empty and needs love to fill it. You can't be lifted up unless you know you are poor."

And so today after 150 years, may this parish and its people still be like its namesake: the young woman Mary who cried out in joy about the new life within her, the young woman who saw her pregnancy as a testament to God's reversing ways, the young woman Mary who was willing to say "yes" to God. And may God magnify the souls of the three people deepening their commitments to God and to us all today... "for the mighty One has done great things for *us all*, and Holy is his name."