

Mary's Song

(Luke 1: 51-53)

The words I have just read are remarkable. This is Mary's song, sung by a teenaged girl, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave voice to the kind of Kingdom that her Son and our Lord would govern. You will remember Mary grew up in the obscure village of Nazareth in what is now northern Israel. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that she had been chosen to be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah. Gabriel told Mary that her relative Elizabeth, well past the child-bearing age, had become pregnant. Immediately Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, both women sensed that God had chosen them for special tasks and would do great things through their children.

Mary was then given by the Holy Spirit insights far too profound for a simple teenager to originate. She declared the impact that her son would have upon the world. She announced three distinct revolutions, which Jesus would instigate and activate. She spoke of these revolutions in the past tense, as if they had already happened. The world has been reeling ever since under the influence of our revolutionary Lord.

Let's consider that it was Mary that gave birth to the Revolution that is the pattern for all others. And as Christians, we are called to work for the continuation of this revolution in our own day. Let's look at three verses which define this revolution: 51, 52, and 53.

Verse 51 speaks of the Spiritual Nature of this Revolution. "He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts!"

Verse 52 Speaks of the Social Nature of this Revolution: "He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud."

Verses 53 speaks of the Economic Nature of this Revolution: "The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold."

The first revolution is spiritual in nature. In verse 51 we read in two other translations: "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." or "The arrogant of heart and mind he has put to rout."

Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Church in the northern suburbs of Chicago, was on a plane one day. The man seated beside him struck up a conversation. Upon finding out that Mr. Hybels was a clergyman, the man said, “Well, I believe in God but I don’t affiliate with any church. Don’t really think I need it. Sure, I make some mistakes but I live respectably and give to charities. I wouldn’t hurt a soul on purpose. I believe that God will accept me on that basis.”

Bill Hybels took out a legal pad and said, “Let’s make a grading scale for all people, from one to ten, with ten being just about perfect. Who are the best people in the world?” The man thought for a moment and said, “Mother Teresa and Billy Graham.” “Okay,” said Bill. “But we must allow them to place themselves on our chart. Each of them has said, ‘I am a sinner and have no chance of salvation unless it is a gift to me from Christ.’ So, by their own admission, they deserve to be down near the bottom of the chart. Now, my next question is, ‘Where should we put you on the chart? You don’t want to be above Mother Teresa, do you?’”

The man replied, “If Mother Teresa is not good enough to get into heaven, I guess I’m in worse shape than I thought.”

Then Bill Hybel drew a cross right across the middle of the chart. Underneath that cross he wrote these words from I John 2:2: “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Underneath that verse he drew a line and said to the man beside him, “Just sign here if you would like to be covered by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Then you can be as sure of going to heaven as Mother Teresa.” The man signed on the dotted line.

The first revolution of Jesus is to banish pride and spiritual self-sufficiency. None of us has any hope until we dump our trash at the foot of the cross.

II

But as we recognize that this revolution is first of Spiritual we also see that it is a social revolution. In verse 52 we read, “He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.” God seems always to be overturning the world’s social

order. He helped a band of Hebrew slaves defeat an Egyptian pharaoh. He took a humble shepherd boy and made him Israel's greatest king. He took a murderer in Paul and made him evangelist to the world. And when he sought a woman to be the mother of the Messiah, he chose a lower-class teenager from a hick town.

Think of that. God brings down the kings and lifts up the peasants. Is it because he values the peasant's life over the kings? No. Is it because he wants those who have no advantages to be given more? No. It is because of corruption that this is done. God does not mind a king being a king if that king is just. He does not mind a peasant being poor so long as the rich help those who are less fortunate. God is not after a social equality he is after hearts of charity whether kings or peasants. To accomplish this he at times humbles the mighty and lifts up the lowly. It is this reversal of fortunes that reminds us we are all equal before God.

No greater example of this can be seen than in the land of Iraq. For the past 25 years a brutal king cared more for himself than his subjects.

It would be a mistake for me to stand here today and tell you that God was involved in the United States actions to topple Saddam. We cannot put God's name on America's efforts. But it would also be a mistake for me to claim that God does not bring down the mighty and corrupt rulers from their thrones. He did it with Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot in Cambodia The Mother of our Lord has said He does. Jesus said, what is done in secret will be shouted on the rooftops. Wrongs, one day, will be righted. Evil for a day but justice is eternal. No doubt you saw pictures of the hole Saddam was found in. There was a certain justice in it:

He lived in a dozen mansions
He was found in a dirt hole

He ate the food of kings
His hole had rotten fruit; cracked eggs on the ground

He laid on lavish beds
He slept with his face in the dirt

He once commanded a mighty military
He was left with a pistol in his pocket he wouldn't use.

He tortured, gassed, and slaughtered 300,000 innocents
Above his doorway hovel was written: In the name of God the most merciful and kind

He once was called the successor of Nebuchadnezzar, the lion of Babylon,
But his tombstone shall read the butcher of Baghdad.

So while it is true that men who wield power for personal gain will be humbled, it is also true that those who humbly serve will be exalted. That's the great truth taught in the Lord of the Rings when Frodo is told:

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.

There are two great lessons taught by Tolkein's Trilogy, no doubt others could be named, but the two great lessons are that in this world evil must be recognized for what it is and it must be confronted and defeated. But the other lesson is that there is something else at work in this world, something that is out of our control. There is a Good. A good that is stronger than the evil. A good that oneday will prevail.

You can't miss the meaning here: The great good is God at work in Christ, The true who one day will be crowned. That's the great reversal. That's where history is headed. God delights in flipping the social order on its head, elevating the humble and putting down the pompous.

III

The third revolution is announced by Mary is economic in nature. In verse 53 we read, "The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold." Another translation puts it this way: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." The Bible is tough on us who, in relation to the rest of the world, are rich. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.”

A Christian society is one in which no person dares to have too much while others have too little. One day a poor girl came to the door of John Wesley. It was a bitterly cold day but she was wearing just a thin linen gown. She was shivering and her teeth were chattering. Wesley gave her what little money he had. Later he looked around his room and saw his extra clothes and fashionable wig. He cried out, “O Lord, have these been bought with the blood of the poor?”

If we die with lots of money in investments, leaving huge amounts to children who don't really need it, while people in Calgary are homeless, hungry, and in despair, God will surely call us to account.

God is a good heavenly father. His focus is on his children with the biggest problems and least resources. And he calls us, his other children, to lend a hand.

This should be the big question for us: How can I help the poor in such a way that I build up their confidence and promote their independence? We don't need more government welfare schemes. We need Christians with imagination who are utterly committed to Christ and the poor.

It is because of verses like this that the Church has always seen as part of her calling to have a special mandate for the poor. It is because of this economic revolution that we as a congregation are involved with Inn From the Cold.

On the Inn From the Cold Web Site the following paragraph is found:

“Inn From The Cold is committed to treating our guests with compassion and respect while providing them with short-term overnight accommodation. We assist guests in finding long-term solutions to their housing and personal needs.

The Society continues to look for ways for homeless families to find independence and a valued place in the community. This includes advocacy for people who have become marginalized. It also includes raising awareness and taking action on issues that will prevent homelessness.

In a community as prosperous and forward-thinking as Calgary, homelessness should

not exist. Working together we will create a better future for all members of our community.”

Inn From the Cold is more than a place where people can come and sleep in a warm, safe church hall. It has as its greater goal to help get people off of the streets by providing help with damage deposits and low cost housing. The Inn From the Cold Society is opening a multi unit apartment that will provide housing for up to forty families.

I would like us to invite someone from the Society to speak to us in the new year so that we can get a sense of what is happening beyond our bi-weekly hosting of guests on the second and fourth Wednesdays.

The Church needs to be a community that ministers amongst the poor and welcomes poor into its membership. After all, when God became flesh, he chose to be one of the “am ha’aretz”, the people of the land, the poor folks.

There’s that reversal again. The king became poor so that the poor might be lifted. Listen to Mary’s words once more:

51He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts.

52He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.

53The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold.

The Song of Mary speaks of a Revolution that is Spiritual, Social and Economic.

That’s Mary’s message to us this Advent and we are invited to make it ours.