

“Women and Children First”

December 23, 2012

The Rev. Damaris D. Whittaker

Luke: 1:46-55

*“My soul magnifies the Lord
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid;
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed;
Because he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.”*

Over the last week I have experienced a variety of emotions, as may have you, in response to the Newtown tragedy. As I struggled with a deep sense of sadness and helplessness, disbelief and sorrow, I also accepted joy, love and hopefulness. The church was opened all week, and I visited with some folks as I would usually do and tried to keep a sense of normalcy, because I truly believe that the darkness shall not overcome the light.

But, one thing that really helped me during those times when I could not find the words. (That is an oxymoron—a preacher without words.) One thing that helped me was a hymn/a song:

*“Wait for the Lord, whose day is near; wait for the Lord,
be strong take heart.”*

As did the song of Donny McCorklin a contemporary gospel singer:

*“What do you do when your heart has been broken and filled with pain,
You just stand, when there is nothing left to do, you just stand, watch the
Lord see you through, after you’ve done all you can, you just stand.”*

And there were moments when I could not utter the words. I just hummed the tune.

By the end of the week, I was singing a hymn sang at my grandmother’s funeral:

“Debes tener paz en la tormenta, fe y esperanza cuando no puedas seguir, Aun con tu mundo hecho pedazos en Señor guiara tus pasos, en paz en medio de la tormenta.”

(English Translation) You will have peace in the midst of your storm, faith and hope when you fall you cannot go on. Even when your world seems to be broken into pieces, God will guide your steps in peace in the midst of the storm.

There is something powerful about a song that touches our souls and deep parts of our spirit. Songs help us express our grief and fears, songs are vehicles that help us express our joy, praise. Songs unite us in Thanksgiving. Songs can be prophetic.

The choir led us in the scriptures consideration this morning by singing Mary's song, *The Magnificat*.

We just heard weeks of preaching during ordinary time about those in the margins, most specifically women and children. We heard of the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord. But today, perhaps for the first time, we are hearing from the women and about the children who are now at the center.

Elizabeth was the wife of Zachariah; both were older and without any children. Zachariah received the news that his wife was going to have a child by way of a vision of an angel who told him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you will name him John.” As a result he was unable to speak -- to that I say “thanks be to God”. Because here it is, the priest, the licensed minister, the experienced theologian is silenced.

So, the stage is set for us to hear from the women and children for a change. I read this week an article in the newspaper entitled “May be our children will lead us.” Certainly, children, and in this case, women, have.

Mary and Elizabeth are pregnant with hope. We look at them as they are, ordinary women in an extraordinary time; in the verge of greatness, but being mindful of their relationship with one another. Elizabeth is pregnant with John and Mary is pregnant with Jesus, and when they come together, the story says that John leap in

Elizabeth's womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke words of prophesy: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Mary sings a song about God's righteousness. Perhaps it would help us to understand the times in which Mary was living. Mary was living in the times of Herod the Great, when taxes were burdensome -- taxes that built the temple and supported Herod's lifestyle, but also cost the poor their land, concentrating wealth at the top and leaving the masses impoverished. Herod was a brutal ruler. It is said that he knew that if he died, people would celebrate. So, he supposedly imprisoned 70 elite Jewish citizens with orders that they be executed the day of his death so that there would be tears in Israel.

But Mary sings regardless of what is happening in her world. She prophesied in the midst of a world that had her in the margins.

Mary sang, not just naming the promises of God, but entering into them. She sang a song with verbs in past tense, in acceptance that God's promises for her. Recognizing that not only God is part of the story of her life, but she is part of God's story.

So this Magnificat, this canticle, this song of Mary sings of an energetic faith a persistent faith that insisted that God would be true to God's promises --justice, healing, compassion -- these are all important matters to Mary.

Both Mary and Elizabeth are strong, gutsy women who raised their extraordinary sons to be leaders, teachers, and troublemakers, too, in the eyes of the powerful – the comfortable, well-fed, powerful who will be brought down by songs like the one Mary sings.¹

Both Mary and Elizabeth knew that this moment is the moment of promise that all these things are about to begin, that the promises are beginning to unfold right before their eyes.

¹ Kathryn Matthews Huey, Inclusive Reflections

Because, as Marcus Borg wrote, “God is an element of experience, not an article of faith to believe in.”²

I hope that, this season, we are impregnated with Hope and as we wait with anticipation for the promises of God. Perhaps this time, we will speak less and sing more. I invite all of us to allow for the songs to enter our hearts.

I hope that we, too, could find our song in God. Maybe we will start with a low humming, but I pray that we may finish with a joyous declaration of God’s promises for us. Proclaiming *Emmanuel*, God with us -- *Dios con nosotros* -- is our hope, God with us, in our joy and our sadness. God with us, in our hearts.

Maybe this time, the women and children can lead us. Amen.

² The God we never knew