

Mary Talks Politics

Luke 1:50-55

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Center Church, Hartford

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Two women, pregnant with their first children, come together to talk, Elizabeth and her young relative, Mary. What would you expect them to be talking about? Well, the stereotype would be things like baby clothes? Names? Will it be a boy or a girl (well, both of them had already been told that news!)? When one of my best friends was pregnant with her first child, she recounted a conversation she had with her husband about her hopes for their child. "Two things," she said, "I hope she's not a screamer and won't be a murderer!" I can report to you, as one who babysat her, that the child was a terrible screamer, but, now in her late 30's, has yet to commit a murder!

Elizabeth and Mary, however, didn't talk about any of those things. Rejoicing that God had something to do with these pregnancies, instead they talked religion and politics, and how their children would be involved in both!

Religion and politics. Remember here that Mary, to whom these words we read this morning are attributed by Luke, was most likely a teenager. She lived in a small town in a country occupied by a foreign power, the Roman Empire. She was a woman in a society in which women were valued, but not invited to be leaders either in religion or politics. And yet, the song she sings is not a lullaby or simply a song of praise. After celebrating her blessings, she then sings that it is so much bigger than her blessing; this child is much more than another baby in Nazareth. She sings with an urgency and a confidence that God would not sit back while people suffered and the evil prospered, because God **had** acted in the past. I sometimes think we have been so lulled by the many beautiful musical settings of this song out there that we take it too lightly. As the song we sang

last week and will again this week reminds us, Mary sang strongly that “the world is about to turn.” Not **her** world, but **the** world.

As I was trying to think about how to get across to us the radicality of this song and the fact of Mary, a pregnant, unmarried, teenage girl, being the singer, I thought about other teenage girls who have defied the stereotypes and gone about telling people that the world needed to turn and that they believed it could and would happen. Malala Yousafzai springs to mind. And Greta Thunberg, the young climate activist. I want to play a clip for you of her speech at the UN Climate Action Conference. Listen to her urgency and hear what Mary might have sounded like. (Go to You Tube and find the clip of Greta at the UN Climate Forum)

You see, with Mary's song here, Christmas is so much bigger than we have allowed it to become. So. Much. Bigger. Christmas can empower us, as it did her, to join with God in turning the world as it is upside down. It can empower us to find our own call from God to be part of God's continual building of the kingdom, maybe working with people like Greta on the urgent task of dealing with the human role in climate change. It can remind us of God's fearless rebuking of political leaders; God's desire to scatter, to humble, those who are proud, as Mary says, and actually that word “proud” can be translated in so many ways, including “arrogant,” or my personal favorite, “bluffing braggarts” (The Message). She reminds us of God's preferential love for the hungry and poor and reprimand of the rich who ignore the poor; of God's history of standing up for those enslaved by anyone or anything.

This Christmas, let us not just remember filtered images of sitting around a tree and opening presents. Let us remember that on Christmas, divine power was released into the world that eventually made a whole lot of trouble in religion and politics. As Jesus burst from Mary's womb, cosmic, divine power burst into our world in a whole new way! That power is still with us, and we can join with it to do, as Mary did, more than we can ask or imagine. Get ready, because the world is about to turn, again! Amen.