



Does God Take Sides? Touchpoint for 12/19/2018

Luke 1:39-56 [NRSV]

Mary Visits Elizabeth: *In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed*

is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary's Song of Praise: *And 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." And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.*

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"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."

Two women meet. Two **women** meet. Both know cultural shame at a very deep level in their lives. One, Elizabeth, has lived with the shame of not being able to get pregnant for most of her life. The other, Mary, is living with the shame of being pregnant too soon in her life. Apparently for women it's damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Two women meet. Two **women** meet. Here at the beginning of the Jesus incarnation, it is **two women** who introduce the coming kingdom, which is kind of interesting when you consider the culture of the time. And then, guess what, it will be a **group of women** who are the first to introduce the risen Lord to the world at the end of the Jesus incarnation. **Women** at the beginning! **Women** at the end! **Women** it seems are the Alpha and the Omega of the incarnation. Now tell me again, why is it that for almost 2,000 years we told them to keep quiet about God things, God talk, and living in Mystery?

Why it's almost as if God is bringing the mighty and proud down with these **two women** and raising up the humble and lowly of heart. Nahhh, the Mystery would never do that. Why, we can't have the Mystery playing favorites can we? We can't have the Mystery taking sides can we?

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Why, we can't have the Mystery playing favorites can we? We can't have the Mystery taking sides can we? But yet, here's the thing: when my boys were younger they used to watch the Power Rangers on TV. I'm sorry, The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. And after the show was over they would beat the snot out of each other because that is what the Power Rangers did to the bad people, monsters, whatever. And so they would do the same. Which I always found curious because after they watched Barney and listened to the "Clean Up" song, they **never** helped clean up. Still haven't figured that one out.

Anyway, while they were smacking each other around, the older one almost always won because he was bigger and stronger. And I would have to intervene, and guess whose side I would take? Guess who I would come to rescue. Yeah, the younger one, the smaller and weaker one. Now I am sure that my older son thought I was playing favorites, but I wasn't. I was simply trying to save myself some medical bills I couldn't afford! But I have no doubt he thought at that point I loved his younger brother more than him.

And that is how it can seem when you are on top, in a position of power, and you hear these words of Mary. *"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."*

Why is God taking sides? That is how it can seem when you are on top, in a position of power, and you hear these words of Mary. Because when entitlement is your baseline equality feels like oppression. When entitlement is your baseline equality feels like oppression.

And don't just ask me, ask any straight white male how he is feeling these days. What with the *Black Lives Matter* and *Me Too* movements to name a couple, much less the most recent mid-term election. Because, you see, when entitlement is your baseline, equality feels like oppression.

Two women meet, two **women** and they speak of the Mystery *"scattering the proud in the thoughts of their hearts"...* *"and bringing down the powerful from their thrones."* **Two women** at the heart of bringing down the powerful from their thrones, and their names aren't Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal, and their methods are very different.

"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."

There is something transformational about this one who comes to us. Things are not left the same. And it isn't that we are simply now given what we always wanted. This is the fatal mistake of the prosperity gospel. It turns God into a magic genie who grants us all our wishes because all things are possible for Him. But the prosperity gospel is not a humbling of the heart. It is not death and resurrection. It is a puffing-up of oneself. It is the turning of ourselves into a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal, where we can shout, "To God be the glory" when we win our personal Super Bowl.

No, there is something transformational about this one who comes to us. And things are not left the same. Richard Rohr writes in his book, *Breathing Under Water*:

"All societies are addicted to themselves and create deep codependency on them. There are shared and agreed-upon addictions in every culture and every institution. These are often the hardest to heal because they do not look like addictions because we have all agreed to be compulsive about the same things and blind to the same problems."

I want to repeat that line: *"we have all agreed to be compulsive about the same things and blind to the same problems."* Rohr continues: *"The Gospel exposes those lies in every culture. The American addiction to oil, war, and empire; the church's addiction to its own exceptionalism; the poor person's addiction to powerlessness and victimhood; the white person's addiction to superiority; the wealthy person's addiction to entitlement. The Gospel exposes those lies in every culture."* So writes Richard Rohr.

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There is something transformational about this one who comes to us. Things are not left the same, and they can't be left the same if we are to be healed. How we respond to this passage says much more about us than it does about the Mystery.

And I'm not sure how I feel about it. On the one hand, I am fully aware that I am not among the 1% and so I kind of like the idea of bringing the mighty and powerful down, but I don't have to drive more than a few minutes from here to realize that to a great many people, I am the proud, the powerful, and the rich.

Sometimes I feel like this passage is the beginning of a cosmic joke that begins with, "Mother Mary walked into my life and said 'I've got good news and bad news for you, what do you want first?'"

"Give me the bad news."

"You're going to be brought low."

"Great, what's the good news?"

"You're gonna be lifted up!"

Well, that is certainly 'good news' as long, of course, as I'm not lifted up like Jesus was, which is probably going to be the reality because, as I've said before: "If you want to hang with Jesus—you have to hang with Jesus."

But maybe that's the point. Maybe the being brought low and the lifting up aren't two different things. Maybe they are the same thing. Maybe it is in the being brought low that we are lifted up. Maybe that's what those in recovery are trying to say to me when they say how thankful they are for their addiction. Maybe that is what my sister means when she says she doesn't need to be healed from her MS because the MS has healed her. Maybe that is what Paul means when he writes in response to the Christ saying to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And Paul writes in response, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness so that Christ's power may rest on me, for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Personally, like Joel Osteen and the rest, I'd much prefer the strength without the weakness, but that's just me, and probably you.

And maybe that's the point of this meal. This meal, that when we talk about it begins with the words, "In the night in which he was betrayed..." Judas, Peter and the rest are going to be brought down to their lowest point in this night. Through betrayal, denial and taking flight, they are exposed for who they are and brought low. And yet, in the depths of their poverty of spirit, they meet the soon to be crucified-one, and a few days later, in his time of doubt and fear, Thomas meets the Risen Christ.

So maybe what Mary is talking about here isn't two different kinds of people: me and **THEM** or me and **THOSE** people. Maybe what she is talking about is me and the crazy mess and mixed up person I am. In my highs and lows, my arrogance and humility, my pride and low self-esteem. And in those highs and lows, arrogance and humility, pride and low esteem, the Christ is with me, working to bring healing to me in all its dimensions. So that the laying low is also the raising up.

You know, I think I have a suggestion for Mary on what to call this kid: how about *Emmanuel—God with us?* But then again, maybe **that woman**, Mary, already knows what I'm just learning.

Wouldn't that just bring me down from my throne!—***and raise me up to a new way of living!***

Amen.