

Those Who Dream...Sow Joy

Today's text comes with a disclaimer, as we journey through this season that is filled with hope, expectation, and optimism for the birth of a baby. I recognize some of you may be experiencing now or have experienced before the feeling of loss, pain, and grief around issues of fertility. Please know the view of Mary's joy that I will share about today is not complete, and in no way is meant to give the impression that only joy can or should be anyone's posture toward God. We are complete and whole in all our emotions...emotions that span from anger to elation. And today we explore the way we sow joy by being those who dream of something beyond what it is...

What is it like to find joy in the middle of uncertainty? What is it like to choose joy when others would have you choose despair? We've had opportunity for both this year, and for some of you, you may be finding yourself in the midst of those questions right now...uncertain and full of despair...wondering where joy can be found.

Mary shows us the way. She shows us how with reckless abandon to embody joy. Let us hear her song in Luke, chapter 1 verses 46 through 55.

And Mary^[a] said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is God's name.

⁵⁰ God's mercy is for those who fear God

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ God has shown strength with God's arm;

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ God has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ God has helped God's servant Israel,

in remembrance of God's mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise God made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

Mary the young girl who is expecting a child before her engagement has become a marriage, a social death in her day, is singing a song of praise, is singing a song of joy.

We find Mary, visiting with Elizabeth, taking on what we perceive to be a strange outlook about her pregnancy and the child that she will deliver into the world. Her joy is fueled by dreams of what could be, of what will be, of what is promised to be, when this child, a child of God, enters the world and changes the course of history forever.

Prior to Mary's song of joy and praise we hear today she is visited by an angel, the same angel who earlier in the chapter visited Zechariah to tell him his wife, already aged and past what would have been typical child bearing years, will in fact bring a child

into the world. This child will be John. And, then an angel visits the young Mary, too young to have a child, because she is not yet married, but the angel promises that she will in fact become pregnant. She visits her relative, Elizabeth, and the two embrace. Seemingly joyful with the news of new life coming into the world through them.

It's worth noting that Mary does not despair, there is no long monologue of Mary in disbelief and full of fear, that doesn't mean those feelings didn't exist. It just means that Luke wants us to focus on something else, maybe he doesn't include the breadth of her feelings because he isn't aware of them, or because he doesn't want the reader to get distracted from the main point that something important is happening through this girl, that something important is happening as new life is being brought into the world.

We're all familiar with the phrase, you reap what you sow. Mary is sowing joy, it is probably the reason so many throughout history have idolized Mary. She takes circumstances that could be life-ending for her and in that she chooses to sow joy. She chooses to praise God.

She chooses to place her dreams in something outside herself. It is a position of extreme vulnerability, she assumes a posture of giving, she finds joy in the well-being and mere existence of something beyond herself, even when the outcome for herself is questionable. She dreams of possibility, possibility that sows joy for herself, and for the world. She embodies a divine joy, not based on the circumstances of life, but rather an internal posture toward the world. It is a decision to see beyond immediate circumstances to something divine. Seeing God at work in you, the one who might otherwise be considered the lowliest of servants.

Mary's song is more than a praise of God, it is a statement to the world, that the powers and principalities that are in place are not the result of God's reign, are not the structures that God deems good or necessary for God's people. She is singing a song of resistance and proclamation, of freedom, for herself, for her child that will be born, for her people, and for all of God's people. A song that dares to dream of what could be, what should be.

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As activist Ruby Sales says of Mary's song: "We expect Mary to sing a blues song with all of this happening. Instead, she sings a freedom song that comes out of her community's struggles and aspirations for economic, social and political freedom, from the bloody, dehumanizing and oppressive chains of the Roman Empire. Her song is a

resistance song that represents her community's refusal to bow down at the altar of Caesar, or to turn over their future to him."¹

Mary, the mother of Jesus, who carries the Christ in her womb, and has been promised by an angel that she will deliver into the world the one called Son of God, sings out in praise of God and in resistance to all that would tell her she is unworthy, she sows joy through the dreams given to her by this child. The same child that will eventually sow seeds of joy and hope and love and peace for each of us, generations later.

Richard Rohr reflecting on Mary this week said this: "Mary proceeds—as we must do in life—making her commitment without knowing much about what it will entail or where it will lead. I treasure the story because it forces me to ask: When the mystery of God's love breaks through into my consciousness, do I run from it? . . . Or am I [centered enough in God] to respond from my deepest, truest self, and say something new, a "yes" that will change me forever?"² This is a yes that allows us to share in God's turning of the world, into what could be, what should be. Invites us into share in God's joy with and for all of creation. Invites us to sing out with joy.

In the act of singing we find freedom, we find a call to resistance, we find a reminder to dream of what could be, what should be...to sow joy. This year we have found ourselves isolated from singing together but today I want to encourage you to

¹ Ruby Sales. "A Christmas Message." *The SpiritHouse Project*. December, 2007. spirithouseproject.org/reflections/reflection-2007-dec.php

² Rohr, Richard. www.cac.org. 12/8/20

sing out loud, to embrace the voice cracking and out of tune notes that may come from your mouth, and allow yourself to sow joy through song, like Mary. The song we are about to sing, The Canticle of the Turning is a song of joy, it is set to an Irish tune, and it's words, written as a direct response to the Magnificat remind us that the world is turning, through Christ's birth into the world, and that God is using us to be the dreamers, to sow joy, to bring all of creation into line with God's divine will. The song starts out with a question: Could the world be about to turn? Then as it moves into verse 2 the question becomes proclamation. And after each verse we sing with exuberant joy and praise: my heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn!

Friends, as we dream for a world that is just for all, that allows dreamers to sow joy, we are actively working toward God's kingdom, we are bringing God's dream to life, we are embodying Christ! Let us cry out with a joyful shout as we join Mary in praising God's name joyfully, resisting what is and embracing what could be, what should be. For the world is about to turn!