



Mary, the Silence Breaker



A Sermon By
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Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-12-17-AAA.mp3>.

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The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
December 17, 2017

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Canticle 15

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

The collect we prayed at the beginning of our service implores God to, “Stir up your power, and with great might come among us...” Today, as we observe the third Sunday of Advent, we delve ever deeper and closer to the celebration of Christmas, when we remember the remarkable way that God did stir up God’s power and come among us in the person of Jesus.

Our readings this week testify to God’s liberating actions in our world. We hear again from John the Baptist who tells the religious authorities that he is not the Messiah, but that the Messiah is coming. We hear the words of the prophet Isaiah, the very words in fact, that Jesus himself read in the synagogue in his hometown at the beginning of his ministry, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...”

We hear very similar words from Jesus’ mother, Mary. In place of the psalm today, we prayed Mary’s Song of Praise. Mary’s Song, found in Luke’s gospel, is often called the Magnificat from the Latin for “magnify.” The Magnificat is Mary’s response to an angel’s message that she is favored by God to be the mother of God’s Messiah. The Magnificat is one of the most powerful testimonies in all of scripture about God’s character and about God’s kingdom. It’s a decree of faithfulness on both the part of the proclaimer, Mary, and the proclaimed, God. And it’s more...

Mary’s Song of Praise is a proclamation of liberation – personal and social, moral and economic. It is a revolutionary manifesto, in which Mary praises God’s liberating actions on her behalf and on behalf of her people, who have been marginalized and exploited. In the Magnificat, Mary evokes the powerful memory of God’s deliverance of Israel throughout its history. She declares God’s faithfulness, fidelity and mercy. And she does so in no uncertain terms. Her words are bold, proclaiming freedom from systemic injustice and from the oppression of political rulers, the arrogant, and the rich. Mary testifies to what happens when God stirs up God’s power and comes among us.

It is this liberating, role-reversing, faithful God whom we celebrate this season. And, we celebrate those people, like Mary, who testified about God and who partnered with God to change the world. One of the hymns we sung this morning, “Sing of Mary,” contains the lyrics, “Sing of Mary, pure and lowly...” While Mary is often remembered as pure and lowly in Christian tradition and hymns, our scripture today presents a different image of Mary. The Magnificat presents an image of Mary as an articulate, wise, prophet who collaborates with God on a bold agenda, namely, to bring the mighty down from their thrones; to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, and to fill the hungry with good things. She is determined, free, and strong. She beckons people, especially women, to speak out for God’s justice, which always needs to be born into our world.

For me, it’s impossible to hear the words of the Magnificat today without thinking of the many women and men who have spoken out publically in recent weeks about sexual harassment and assault, and the many prominent perpetrators who have since been “brought down from their thrones.” TIME Magazine refers to these people as, the Silence Breakers, and named them collectively TIME’s 2017 Person of the Year.

The people who have broken their silence on sexual assault and harassment span all races, all income classes, all occupations and virtually all corners of the globe. But they all have one thing in common – they shared their stories, they unleashed their voices and named their truths. They spoke up and out against injustice, despite potential backlash. Despite the risk of not being believed, they spoke out. They broke the silence. They are strong. They are fierce. They are brave.

The Magnificat is their inheritance, for these people, like Mary, proclaimed deeply personal and political truths. Mary is a kindred spirit to the Silence Breakers for she recognized the inherent brokenness of her time and spoke out against it. She is strong, fierce, and brave. It was to this kind of woman that God sent an angel, greeting her with deference and asking her to partner with God to do a new thing in the world. This fiercely strong woman recognized that God's justice needed to be born into our world and accepted God's invitation.

This invitation to bear God's justice into the world is one that God extends not just to Mary, but to all of us – female and male. German theologian and philosopher, Meister Eckhart, famously said, "We are all called to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born." Our world needs God and God needs us to reveal God's self to the world.

Mary said yes to God because she knew what revolutionary things would happen if God stirred up God's power and came among us. We, like Mary, are also invited to partner with God to bring God's self into the world. Will we, like Mary, say yes?

There are many ways to birth God into our world. We birth God into our world when we, like the Silence Breakers, call for an end to injustice. We birth God into our world when we refuse to be complicit with systems of domination and abuse. We birth God into our world when we, like John the Baptist, testify to the light of the world. We birth God into the world when we, like Isaiah, bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. We birth God into the world when we pray and believe that God might stir up God's power and come among us.

God has already stirred up God's power and come among us in a very real and tangible way in the person of Jesus. And God yearns to come among us still, if we are willing, like Mary, to collaborate with God. Are you willing? Are you ready? Revolutionary things await when we break our silence. Amen.