

Listen to Mary!

Sermon Luke 1: 39-55

3rd Sunday in Advent

December 15th, 2024

This sermon is a monologue from the perspective of Mary, mother of Jesus.

I am Mary. The mother of Jesus, the mother of God. And I've become a mother figure for many who were – and are - overwhelmed by a threefold all-male God.

From early on, I was venerated by the church, put on a pedestal. And it's quite astonishing what I was made into. I was declared an eternal virgin, immaculate. And because I am a woman, a descendant of that original sinner, Eve, early church fathers and theologians thought that I must give a special progeny – that I just couldn't participate in what is known as 'original sin'. So they construed that I had to be conceived immaculately by my own mother as well to be worthy of adoration and veneration. And because of my so special status, of course I couldn't be a mere mortal – and so the story became popular that I was taken up to heaven without having to go through death.

So many legends were constructed around me – little me, Mary, a simple young woman from a simple family in the Galilean backwater of Nazareth, population 500. O, my family claimed that we were descendant from the ancient King David, God's chosen, Israel's idealized ruler – but 1,000 years had left the house of David in ruins and desolate. What did the Romans care about the house of David? What did Herod care about the house of David?

And even though some among my people still had this stubborn and defiant hope against all hope that God once more would raise a king like David from the house of David, there were also those who had given up on this promise, this dream. Not even the remnant of Israel really cared about the house of David anymore.

Nobody cared about me, just another young woman, destined to be just another insignificant housewife and mother, married to an insignificant carpenter, far away from any centers of political or economic or religious power. I was a powerless young woman from a powerless region. When I was a child, the occupying Romans forces came down on us in all their brutality – I don't remember, why, and it doesn't really matter. The Romans did not only burn our fields, they also salted

them, just to make sure we wouldn't be able to plant and harvest for a while, and plunged the region into a famine. This, by the way, is a historical fact.

But then the miracle happened: God chose me, little me, to help fulfill God's promise of redeeming the house of Israel. Me, a lowly handmaid. God didn't need extra holiness, God didn't need someone conceived immaculately, God didn't need someone extraordinary to carry and give birth to God's son. God chose the lowly, the insignificant, the ordinary, to make a point: for God, all things are possible. God's power doesn't manifest itself in what is considered power among human beings. God's power is subtle and profound and is often found in the small and ordinary moments and actions of our life.

I don't know why men of the church had to gild the lily and make me into this super human, super saint, exalted above all other saints. I don't think God had that in mind when I was chosen to fulfill God's will.

But who listens to me?

Yes, they have put me on a pedestal, they made me holier than I am. But they also tried to keep me quiet. Have you ever looked at the graven images they made of me? Have you looked at paintings or sculptures?

There I am: the Madonna, meek and mild, holding her child, eyes cast down, gazing tenderly upon the Godchild, maybe a sad little smile on the lips. Those lips, however, are sealed. What could this woman have to say now that she has fulfilled her purpose?

Even in images of the annunciation, you know, the time when the Angel Gabriel came to me and told me that I would be the bearer of God's child, I am just sitting there, mute, arms chastely crossed in front of my chest, eyes cast down, listening to what I am being told. Artists seem to forget that I had a say in the whole thing, that I opened my mouth. First, I pushed back. How can this be? And then, I consented: Here I am, let it be with me according to your word.

Ah, and don't get me started about all those images of me holding the dead body of my son, those pieces of art that are known as the 'Pieta'. Instead of an infant, the artists now put the form of a grown man into my arms – my posture is pretty much the same as with the Christ child. I am resigned to my fate, I don't say a mumbling word, my lips are closed. Really?

Like any mother who loses her child, I was out of my mind! I was crying, I was wailing, I was screaming to the heavens, why, why, why?

I have a voice! The voice of every mother on this planet, the voice of one who knows what it means to be ignored, oppressed, abused and extorted. The voice of one who knows what it is like to suffer loss, and to grieve.

I have a song, a defiant song, a song that praises God and protests injustice; a song about God taking sides, the side of the underdog. But has my song ever been taken to heart?

Why are there so few hymns using my words, my voice? It's one in the Chalice hymnal you are using. Why, during this season, don't you hear my voice when you turn on the radio and turn to the stations that blast holiday songs 24/7? You may hear, 'Mary, did you know,' but even in this song I am not given a chance to answer...

I have a voice. I have a song. I couldn't keep my mouth shut, and I still can't. I still need to speak up for all those who are lowly, who are treated like dirt, who are assaulted, and silenced. Those who try to play by the rules of the system and just can't win, no matter, how hard they try. Those who suffer from warfare, natural disasters, conflict and hunger and who have nowhere to go – or are rejected once they reach a land where there is safety.

This is my voice. This is my song.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

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

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1)

God came into this world, God became flesh, God became human to turn the world around. God signaled through my lowliness and the human lowliness of his own existence that we will not be saved by knowledge or progress or money or violent power, but through a God who dies on the cross. My son, the Christ, teaches us humility before God and with each other, love, mercy forgiveness; he teaches us to see and acknowledge our neighbor as a child of God. This is the power we are given. This is the power that already changes the world, often in ordinary and seemingly insignificant circumstances. This is the power that affirms life. This is the power that will prevail in the end.

This is my song, and it still needs to be heard after so many years.

So thank you for listening to my song – and to my voice. And I hope and pray that you never cease singing YOUR songs of defiant joy, even and especially when times are dark.

Amen