

“A MATTER OF TRUST”

The Rev. Victor Kim

Psalm 126, Luke 1:46b-55

(12-13-20) Advent 3

You'd think that Mary would have been scared out of her mind. She's a young woman, most likely just barely into her teenage years. She's engaged to be married but before the marriage takes place, she has a visit from an angel, Gabriel, who tells her that the Lord is with her and that she has found favour with God. What that means in practical terms, says Gabriel, is that she, Mary, a virgin, is pregnant, pregnant with God's son.

You'd think Mary would have been terrified, **but she sings!** Here she is in our text from Luke's gospel this morning singing! My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...surely from now on all generations will call me blessed. Young, unmarried, a virgin and pregnant by unexplainable means, yet Mary is singing, she's rejoicing, she says that she is blessed. And what does she sing? She sings of things that haven't happened as if they have already been done. God **has** scattered the proud and brought down the powerful. God **has** lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty. I don't know about you but when I look around our world I see plenty of proud and powerful people who haven't been scattered or brought down. I see far too many lowly and hungry who haven't been filled or lifted up and I don't know too many rich who have been sent away empty. That's not the world I'm familiar with and I suspect it's not the one you are either.

Maybe Mary's delusional, maybe she's cracking under the stress of an impending marriage to a man she hardly knows or of living under the rule of an occupying power. How is she not afraid? How can she sing? But here's the thing, she **was** afraid, she **was** very afraid, **terrified**. Earlier in the story of Mary, when Gabriel announces God's favour to her, Mary was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. I think our English translation of the original Greek doesn't do the intention justice. The Greek word used here for perplexed **means to agitate greatly, through and through, to be intensely disturbed**. And her pondering comes from a word that means leading to **a confused conclusion**. So, initially at the news from Gabriel, **Mary is greatly agitated, intensely disturbed, completely confused**. Other translations say that she was **terrified** and really why wouldn't she be? Wouldn't you be?

In my conversation with Karleen she spoke of the fear she has around situations when she isn't in control. I think we can all relate. Now for most of us loss of control and the fear associated with it doesn't revolve around car issues and I know that Karleen was only using it as an example. But there are serious issues where our loss of control, our inability to have a meaningful say over a situation does leave us somewhere between being intensely disturbed and completely confused.

We've been living through such a situation for the past year. The pandemic has left so many of us in a situation where we feel powerless, where we have no control over what's happening

to our lives. People have lost their livelihood, their jobs, their savings invested in their businesses. They've lost the freedom to gather with their families, friends, their loved ones. We've lost the ability to worship together in person, to sing together, whether in a congregation or in a choir. We miss the ability to share in fellowship over a cup of coffee with something to munch and mingle over. Our health has been compromised and of course, in the worst-case situations, people have lost their loved ones, lost the ability to be with them in the last moments of life, lost the support that meaningful ritual brings to those moments of transition. Each weekday at 3pm as we listen or watch Dr. Bonnie Henry deliver the latest numbers of those infected and those who have died, **don't you feel a sense of helplessness** and don't you feel **powerless** when new restrictions are announced and when you realize that despite the best intentions of those in authority, too many people aren't respecting the guidance and the curve just doesn't seem to be flattening as we would like?

And it's not just the pandemic. We know what loss of control is like when we get that diagnosis from our doctor that we either feared or never imagined we'd ever hear. We know what it's like when a relationship takes a sudden downturn, when a spouse or a child or a friend tells you that they're going in a different direction, leaving you perplexed and pondering, scared and confused. We know what it's like to work as hard as we can but know that we just can't keep up with the costs or when you get a letter from your bank saying that you're overdue, or when your boss calls you in and says that they would keep you if they could. Loss of control is a fearful thing. So what do we do when we are no longer in control, when fear overtakes us and we are left perplexed and pondering? **We turn back to Mary.** Mary sings – She rejoices – She says she is blessed. **What's changed?** Has God explained everything to Mary so that she can fully understand? Has God given her the biological rationale for a virgin's pregnancy? Has God allowed Mary to time travel into the future to see everything God has done so that Mary can rejoice with confidence and sing with assurance? No, none of these things. **So what's changed?**

It's a matter of trust. When we lose control, who then has control, and do we trust the one who does? I trust my mechanic, as much as Karleen trusts hers, maybe more. I trust my doctor when I don't feel well. I learned last year as I spent over a month in hospital with an illness I could have never imagined, to trust those who looked after me. And even though I know that she is struggling with the pandemic as much as the rest of us, I have come to trust Dr. Henry and the others who are working so hard to lead us through this crisis. Why? Because of previous experience, because of a history of interaction. Trust is built up over time. I trust my mechanic because he has delivered in the past. He has been honest with me, he doesn't try to take advantage of me, he stands by his work. He has done good work and I trust him to continue doing good work. I trust my doctors because they have been trained and educated to be healers, to the best of their ability. I know that they aren't magicians, but they have helped me in the past and I trust them to do so in the future.

I trust those who are leading us through this pandemic, not because I know Dr. Henry or anyone else in that capacity personally, but I trust in the system that we have built up, a system of public health that has responded to past pandemics and epidemics.

It's not perfect by any means and we all wish that we could avoid the early mistakes and missteps that can be costly, but experience has shown that eventually those entrusted with our care do what's necessary to help move us back to a better place of health.

It's a matter of trust. It's amazing what having someone you can trust can mean when you don't have control. Remember when you were a child, when you were upset, something had happened, it felt like the end of the world. Maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend broke your heart or you were struggling in school or with your friends. Life seemed out of control and you were in tears, but your mother was there, your father was there, to hold you, to console you, to tell you that even though it hurt, that it would be okay. And because they always took care of you before, you trusted them when they said things would be okay. When you are in crisis, perplexed, greatly disturbed, terrified, and someone you trust says, it's okay, I'm here, I'm with you, I can help, you're safe, there is a sense of joy that rises, that sometimes find voice in song, in rejoicing and we know that we are blessed.

Have you read Mary's song? It's usually called the Magnificat because of the opening line, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." Did you hear that? Mary's soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God, her Saviour. **Mary trusts in God.** Told by an angel that she, a virgin, would be with child, told by Gabriel that her child would be called the Son of the Most High, that he will be called the Son of God, terrified at first, she eventually responds to Gabriel, **"Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."**

If you read Mary's song you might hear an echo of an earlier song, this one from another mother with an unexpected child. Hundreds of years earlier a woman named Hannah prayed for a child, but she was unable to conceive. But God heard Hannah's prayer and a son was born to her, a boy named Samuel. Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord's work and Samuel grew up in the temple at Shiloh. **Then Hannah prayed, and her prayer was a song much like Mary's.** In fact if you read Hannah's prayer from 1 Samuel 2, you will find many similarities to Mary's song. What's obvious is that Mary knew Hannah's prayer. **She knew it because she knew her scriptures, the traditions of her faith.** Mary's song is modeled after Hannah's prayer, from the beginning of the song which declares rejoicing in the Lord to the way both Mary and Hannah speak of the future as having already taken place. **Mary knows her history, her tradition, the faith of her people. And that faith tells the story of God's love for God's people, for God's creation. It tells of God's saving acts throughout history,** that when the people God loves wandered away from God, God would not abandon them, God always found a way to bring his people back. It's the story in the reading from our Psalm this morning, when the Psalmist declared that the Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Like the Psalmist's, Mary's faith tells the story of a God who loves so much that God promised a Saviour, a Messiah, a Son, who would bear God's love and God's own life to God's people.

It's a matter of trust. Mary trusted God. Mary trusted in the God she knew, in the God of her faith, the God who delivered in the past and the God she was confident would deliver again. When she knew that her life would no longer be under her control, she trusted in God and rejoiced in him. **Who do we trust? Who do you trust?** I know that the immediacy of the moment can overwhelm our broader context, but when we feel that we have no control, when we are terrified, scared, fearful and perplexed, I pray that we would remember what God has done for us already. I pray that we would be reminded that our God is a God who in Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for our redemption, our restoration, our salvation, both for eternity and in the here and now.

I suppose if you don't know, if this relationship isn't part of one's history, it would be hard, there would be little or nothing to draw upon. That's why we continue to tell people about Jesus, so that people who don't know would come to know and come to build those experiences with a God who loves them dearly and so deeply. But for those of us who do know, those of us who can reach back into the experiences we have had with God, who can draw upon the promises of our faith, promises delivered and promised kept, promises we have seen evidence of in our own lives, **when our lives seem out of our control, we rejoice because they are not out of God's.** We don't know everything that God does, **but we know enough.** We can't time travel, **but we do know the future. It's a matter of trust.** And as we trust in God, may our joy be voiced in our song and may we echo Mary in rejoicing in God our Saviour.

Thanks be to God, Amen.