



## **Borrowing Hope**

**Luke 1:46-55**

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The season of Advent is coming to a close with just a few days remaining until the Christmas celebration really begins. As we have named a few times in the past month, Advent is an intentional season of waiting. It's a time of penitence, and it invites us to admit that we are a broken people in need of the good news of Christ.

In the past few weeks, I've been asked more times than I can count, "how are you doing?" It's a collegial word of greeting, a friendly conversation starter, and a honest check-in. How are you doing?

I have found myself unable to answer that question without first adding the caveat, "Well, for 2020, I'm doing alright." I find myself struggling to give an honest and committed response, because, well, it's 2020 ... how are we supposed to be doing? We are nearing the end of a year that has seen streets filled with protestors, buildings burning, businesses closing, food lines growing, self-isolation, and over 300,000 dead from an unexpected virus. That I'm healthy and standing here before you today is, well, it's something. I'm here, and for this year, that seems like a welcome accomplishment.

The Leadership Board met last week for our end-of-year gathering (on Zoom of course). In the meeting, I was trying to recap the year in the life of our church, trying to find metrics to measure what 2020 has meant in the life of this community. Admittedly, it's a hard year to measure with any form of standard measurements. But I found some metrics that seem to speak into our current reality.

With worship moving online, I looked up our online host to see what metrics they measured as to worship participation. Since March 22, we've had 176 prayer requests submitted during worship. We've had over 3,000 log-ins to participate in worship, totaling over 157,000 minutes of worship shared together. We've hosted over 200 Zoom calls, with over 1300 log-ins for over 220 hours of book study, prayer gatherings, Conversations on Race, Leadership Board meetings, staff meetings, virtual summer camp, Digital Fellowship, and Coffee at-the House Chat. We've received over \$90,000 in dedicated financial support – beyond our General Ministry – to help with Open Table, Grocery and Hot Meal Distributions, and other community-focused ministries. In these community ministries, we've served over 3,300 hot breakfast sandwiches, over 1,500 hot dinners, and over 2,500 families worth of groceries.

When I think about the question, "how are you doing?", I can't help but reflect on these types of statistics. In her book, *A Weary World*, Kathy Escobar says that when hope is running low, sometimes the best thing we can do is borrow hope from one another.<sup>1</sup> I've heard that sentiment shared by many of you this year – that in isolation, in the struggles of managing work and home life from the same building (or same room), in the exhaustion of being parent, teacher, and employee, in the difficulties of

maintain health and community – that we’ve turned to one another for hope. We’ve found something life-giving in our shared work together. We’ve found motivation and sustenance in the conversations, and Zoom gatherings, and worship chat, and joint resolutions to do more than survive for ourselves, but to maintain our mission of sharing God’s love with the greater community.

This morning, as we journey down the final days of Advent, I want us to hear Mary’s song – the Magnificat – that we might borrow hope from the voice of the mother of Jesus.

There’s a popular phrase that says, “the artists will save us.” There’s something moving about the way art inspires and motivates. Whether it’s Yo-Yo Ma offering video vignettes to get us through the early days of the COVID pandemic, or Beyonce or Kendrick Lamar’s provoking performances at the Grammys, or Banksy’s boundary-pushing art installations, there’s something powerful about the way art moves us, regardless the medium.

Perhaps this is why Mary’s Magnificat has stood the test of time as one of the most often read Biblical passages leading up to Christmas. Mary is both poet and vocalist as she proclaims the impact of God in her life, and the more eternal promise of God in the life of creation. Her art is salvific – it proclaims a message of salvation.

Mary begins her song with reflection of God’s impact in her personal narrative. Verses 47 through 49 set Mary firmly in the lineage of faithful women who have been part of the history of God’s covenant. She is next in a line of women who conceived a child when most unexpected, furthering the story of God’s people. Whether Sarah, or Hannah, or Elizabeth, or Mary, “Their barrenness is the sign that God has intervened in history to permit the birth of this child. And the child is an essential element in the continuation of the people of God.”<sup>ii</sup>

Mary sings in rejoicing melody, “[God] has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” As we highlighted last week, Mary was a nobody – a young, betrothed woman in Nazareth, a town of little significance prior to Jesus’ birth. And yet, God chose her, one thought to be of little consequence, to bear the greatest of infants. Mary continues in her song, “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.” ... She wasn’t wrong. We continue to sing her song today and to call her blessed, for as one who was a nobody, God chose her to be somebody, to deliver the one body, who would save everybody.

And with that promise, Mary shifts from singing of the good news of God’s work in *her* life to rejoicing for the good news of God’s work in the life of all humanity. She sings these verses in what is called the *aorist* tense. She’s not just describing what God *has* done, nor is she describing what God *will* do. She’s proclaiming God’s timeless truth, naming what God has, is, and will do, in the “past, present and future without differentiation.”<sup>iii</sup>

She sings, “[God’s] mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in 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.” “So sure is [Mary] that God will do what is promised that it is proclaimed as

accomplished fact.”<sup>iv</sup> Mary is not hypothesizing what God will do, she is not wondering as if God has not yet proven God’s self. She is proclaiming with assurance that what God has already done, and what God is already doing, God will continue to do until it is fully and wholly accomplished. And she believes it with such certainty, that she proclaims it as if it is already accomplished.

In looking to borrow hope from Mary, we had best be certain we know of what hope she is proclaiming, because the reality is not every one hears the promise of Mary’s Magnificat with the same enthusiasm. Professor Fred Craddock offers, “More is involved [in Mary’s song] than the social message and ministry of Jesus in behalf of the oppressed and poor. That will follow, to be sure, but here we have a characteristic of the final judgement of God in which there is a complete reversal of fortunes: the powerful and rich will exchange places with the powerless and poor.”<sup>v</sup> As it is often named regarding the teaching of Jesus, if it is not good news for the poor, it is not the *good news* of God. Mary’s proclamation in poetic verse rings an intentional alarm for those who sit in thrones of gold, or who are fed with a silver spoon. “Mary’s Song boldly proclaims a social revolution: God’s realm redraws the map of human social and political relations and inverts conventional roles.”<sup>vi</sup>

And we should not be surprised that this is the promise of God in Jesus Christ, for Christ will not be the first implementor of such a radical transformation. “The social revolution of God’s realm [in Jesus Christ] continues an ancient story. It is about a God who remembers mercy and keeps covenant with God’s people.”<sup>vii</sup> In her proclamation, Mary is defining the Child to come as the continuation of God’s work – *this is God’s work*, she proclaims.

And so we should ask, so as to be clear, even in our weary state, what is the hope that we are borrowing from Mary’s Magnificat? What is the hope that we are so looking forward to celebrating in the birth of Christ? What is it that will define the light that is come in the darkness?

To answer these questions, we have to understand the birth of Christ firmly in the continuation of God’s eternal work. From the Garden, to the Wilderness, to the Flood, to the Exile, to the prophets and kings, to Christ, to Pentecost, to Consummation ... God’s desire is for the shalom – the well-being – the wholeness – the peace of creation. Though Christmas has become hijacked by our capitalistic cultural norms, though it has been turned into a question for the best individual acquisitions that are delivered under the tree by a jolly old Saint Nick, the promise of God in the birth of Christ is about a cultural reversal of power and wealth.

When we borrow hope from Mary, the hope we are provided is not one of self-gratification, nor is it about personal salvation. The invitation of God in the gift of Jesus Christ is not to see that our personal life has been made well. The invitation of God in the gift of Jesus Christ is not for our own promise of redemption. The gift, as proclaimed by Mary in her song, is about far more than any individual hope or desire – that is such a limited and selfish understanding of God’s promise in Christ. This hope – the joy of Christmas – is about a grand realignment of human priority, to bring us back to the vision of the Garden; to refocus us on the promise of the wilderness; to regift us with the reminder of the covenant.

And I know, such a radical hope can be terrifying. Mary and the Shepherds were fearful in the promise of the angels, and we might be too. “Hope will require letting God’s spirit move in ways that feel

mysterious, scary, and often unfamiliar.”<sup>viii</sup> For the reality is, in the world you and I have come to know, our individual success is what is praised and lifted up as primary. But for God, for Christ, for the proclamation of Mary in the Magnificat, the promise is not just about our personal well-being – it is an affirmation that the work of God, the promise of Christ, the great joy that is worth celebrating, declares that we are all one in God’s kin-dom.

And this hope – this joy – this birth declares that even in the brokenness, light is shining forth. For only when the darkness is brought to light, can we live into the reality that Mary says is, has been, and will be in God’s presence. It means having hope that no matter how difficult to name, in the hidden places of our church’s own racist history, we can find strength and community in naming our past and promising to let God move us to a better future. It means having hope that through the immigrant, though long abused and estranged, we might find a greater connection with God’s global creation, and live more fully into God’s vision for all of humanity. It means having hope that though millions nationally, and billions globally, are starving for food, that God has provided enough for all to be well fed – and that through a reallocation of power and wealth, no one must go hungry. It means realizing that, though hundreds of thousands of people have died of COVID, if we work together – if we care more about the communal need than our personal comfort – we can put an end to the suffering and pain that has defined It means having hope, that no matter how hurt, or broken, or depressed, or weary we may be, God has not left us to our own – but *Emmanuel*: God is with us, God is empowering us, God is enlightening us, God is waking us up to a new dawn.

This is the hope of Mary, the promise of God, the assurance of Christ. The invitation that lie ahead of us in the stable, in the manger, in the arms of Mary is promised in the Magnificat – it’s an invitation to create a new hope, to see a new future, to engage in a new promise, to receive a new inspiration ... for this is not just the future work of God, it is the work God is already doing, and in full assurance, it is the work God has already done.

So have hope, and prepare to receive the gift of God that assures this hope in Christ that we may rejoice in the Lord together. For the glory of God, Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Kathy Escobar. *A Weary World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020..

<sup>ii</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez. *Luke: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Fred B. Craddock. *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

<sup>iv</sup> Craddock.

<sup>v</sup> Craddock.

<sup>vi</sup> John T. Carroll. *Luke: A Commentary (New Testament Library)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

<sup>vii</sup> Carroll.

<sup>viii</sup> Escobar.