

December 20, 2009 Sermon – Micah 5:2-5a; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; **Luke 1:39-55**

The Really Incredible Stuff – “We are all meant to be mothers of God for God is always in need of being born.” Meister Eckhart

William Willimon tells the story of a college student talking to him about how the virgin birth was just too incredible to believe. Willimon responded, “You think that’s incredible, come back next week. Then, we will tell you that ‘God has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.’ We’ll talk about the hungry having enough to eat and the rich being sent away empty. The virgin birth? If you think you have trouble with the Christian faith now, just wait. The virgin birth is just a little miracle; the really incredible stuff is coming next week.”

Well, today is “the next week.”

As a mother, I want to focus on the two pregnant women: Mary and her Aunt Elizabeth, who share a special bond. It’s not just the fact that Elizabeth carries John, Jesus’ cousin who will prepare the way, and Mary carries Jesus, the son of God, the Savior of the world; it’s the tenderness of two pregnant women realizing the joy amidst the adversity because of the life that they carry within themselves and what it will mean for all of the world. It’s that moment when Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting and the baby leaps inside of her; even then, knowing that there is something different, something amazing about the baby that that teenage Mary carries.

And yet, there is a part of this story, a part of the beautiful song that Mary sings that grabs my attention even more after having returned from Cameroon, Africa. It’s about today being the next week’s material that Willimon talked about with one of his college students: It’s about scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly and feeding the hungry (vss. 50-53).

Mary will give birth to a son, the Savior, who will become the Christ who preaches “blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are the weak.”

No, this gospel today is not about my reminiscing about the joy of pregnancy and only remembering the good things because with it also came pain – the 50 lb. weight gain, the too low blood pressure that resulted in fainting, the morning sickness that somehow lasted all day, the struggle of the birth and the fear of changing the birth plan after 27 hours of labor and hearing the first cry of my firstborn, finally, after a C-section. No, I could really get into some details there, but I won’t – that is not the point today.

The point is, at least, I think that this is a point, is that Jesus' coming into the world, the beautiful song sung for the lowly is about being chosen by God. "Being chosen by God," William Barclay writes, "so often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow." Pregnancy can mean joy and pain. Mary's song is both a song of praise and a song that recognizes suffering –

- This child that was born of Mary inspired such a song.
- This child that was born of Mary would come to bring both joy and sorrow.
- This child that was born of Mary would come to live both joy and sorrow.
- This child that was born of Mary would come to die both joy and sorrow.

Jesus came into the world to change the world – sorrow will turn to joy.

For when Mary speaks – no, when she sings of what will be accomplished – she uses the verbs in past tense form (he has performed, he has scattered, he has brought down, has lifted up, he has filled, he has sent) signifying that it WILL take place because it already has taken place! There's that much confidence in what God promises to do through Jesus, the baby in her womb, that the talk of justice and mercy is timeless!

Willimon is right. It does seem like really incredible stuff, almost too good to believe, and yet, there it is in Luke, chapter 1. Although, maybe we find it hard to believe because we are in a pretty comfortable life and we wonder what the reversals mean for ourselves. Or maybe we find ourselves among the lowly and the hungry and we wait in anticipation for what God has promised. Maybe if we get too caught up in the "Me" of life we forget to join our voice with those who rejoice in the words of Mary's song: the lowly, the hungry and the forgotten.

For me, this passage has changed, for I have come face to face with the lowly, the hungry and the forgotten.

- The descended stomachs of children who are malnourished in Cameroonian villages.
- The woman on the surgical table at the mission hospital in Ngaundrere with the huge machete cut on her leg from her husband, screaming in pain.
- The struggling seminary professors at The Lutheran Institute in Meiganga who haven't been paid a salary in three months.

And yet, the faces of the lowly, the hungry and the forgotten are not only half-way around the world – we have those faces in our own communities.

Those Cameroonians and missionaries that we met amidst the adversity and pain of life as the lowly, hungry and forgotten do NOT stay there. Those that follow Christ know and live the JOY of Mary's song as they live within their sorrows. They understand what it means to be a community of God, a community of faith.

They know, as Eckhart writes, that “we are all meant to be mothers of God (like Elizabeth and Mary), for God is always in need of being born.”

- In the midst of the coming dry season, we still gathered together with the seminary families of The Lutheran Institute in Meiganga for a celebration feast.
- In the face of threats received from a faction group, 155 of 158 Lutheran Cameroonian pastors, 10 people from South Dakota and a group from Norway and other African countries worshipped together and celebrated at the installation of Bishop Nywe in Ngaunderere.
- One kilometer outside a small village in northern Cameroon we gathered together for a prayer service, speaking different languages, but praising and praying to the same God in Christ Jesus.

Soon, in our worship service, our voices will join together in singing Mary’s song, where we, too, will praise the one who will bring down the powerful, raise up the lowly and feed the hungry. We KNOW God’s powerful love because we live in it each day through his Son. We know God’s powerful love -- each one of us is a mother of God because God is in need of being born to us this day, in this place, to bring good news to all.

Helpful Resources:

1. Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Luke Commentary*.
2. Craddock, Fred. *Luke Interpretation Commentary*.
3. Danker, Frederick W. *Luke Proclamation Commentaries*.
4. Hinkle Shore, Mary. Pilgrimpreaching.com. (Willimon story)