

Sermon

Sunday, Dec 23, 2018

Luke 1:39-55

Preacher: The Rev. David Martin

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

The War on Christmas

I don't know if you've heard about it, but there is a "War on Christmas. "

I'd like for us to think about it today, because it is my belief there is an ACTUAL war on Christmas being waged by the very people who claim there is a SUPPOSED war on Christmas.

Robert Williamson, a professor of religious studies at Hendrix University, states that Christmas is – in its very nature – a revolution. And it's Mary who started that revolution.

In the gospel lesson this morning – as well as the beautiful canticle sung by the choir - and also interpreted into modern context in our opening hymn – we heard the Magnificat, the song of Mary. Mary has learned from the angel Gabriel that she will give birth to a child who is going to be the redeemer of the world. Excited, she goes to share the amazing news with her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a woman far beyond regular child-bearing age, is pregnant as well. Her baby (who will grow up to be John the Baptist) jumps for joy in Elizabeth's womb at Mary's news. Both women know great things are going to happen. Mary is so overcome with awe and wonder, she sings a song of God's amazing deeds.

We often think of Mary as being "meek and mild." But I'm betting a young girl, barely a teenager, had to be pretty spunky to take on the task she'd been given. I'll bet her statement – her song – sounded something like this interpretation from The Message, by Eugene Peterson:

*I'm bursting with good-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.*

*God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!*

*What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.*

*His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.*

*He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.*

*He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.*

*The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.*

*He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.*

*It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.*

Mary knew – she just KNEW – that the birth of Jesus was going to turn the world upside down.

The rich were going to be knocked down. And they weren't going to be knocked down just a few pegs. The rich and those in power are going to be put down from their seats, sent empty away, removed from their thrones, left out in cold, and knocked off their high horses. And those who are oppressed, well, their luck was about to change. God was going to exalt the humble and meek, fill the hungry with good things, lift up the lowly, pull them out of their problems, pile mercies on them, feed them a banquet...

Yeah! All right. Christ is coming and all the world is about to turn. But wait! If you listen closely to Mary's song, she's not telling us things are GOING to change. Mary doesn't speak in the future tense. Mary is singing in the PAST tense.

Mary tells us that God has already done all these incredible things:

God HAS shown mercy.
God HAS scattered the proud
God HAS cast down the mighty
God HAS lifted the lowly
God HAS prepared a banquet for the hungry
God HAS sent the rich away empty

Really? God has already done all that? No offense, but from where I'm standing, that does not appear to be the case. The rich are getting richer. The poor are getting poorer. And no one seems to be doing a thing about it. So, what's Mary talking about?

I believe Mary is talking about God coming to earth as a human. Mary knows that God is going to be one of us. So even before the child she is carrying is born, Mary knows that the social structure of the earth is going to change. Everyone is now equal. Since God is no longer above us, but one of us, all our human-made constructs of class and social inequality are gone. All humans are equal – because God has deemed us worthy to become one of us.

Mary knows there is going to be a social revolution – and since she carries Jesus in her womb, she speaks in the present tense. For her, the change – the revolution – is happening now. The birth of Jesus is a revolution. The holiday we call Christmas is a revolution. We are celebrating a revolution.

Well, thanks Mary, but it's been 2,000 years and I still don't see that happening.

And you know why? Because there is a war on Christmas! The people in power don't want to give it up. The rich don't want to give anything away. The privileged don't want anyone else to have what they have. How can they be special if no one is oppressed?

So, to stop the revolution of Christmas from actually taking place, the distraction of a war on Christmas was invented. Sure, we've only been hearing about this supposed war for the past decade or so. But it's been going on since the birth of Christ. No one is stopping anyone from actually celebrating Christmas. We are free to rejoice at the birth of Christ any way we want. We can join the revolution right now.

I'm standing up here today to say that God and the Sweet Little Baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not care what greeting you use at this time of year. Merry Christmas. Happy Holidays. Season's Greetings. Happy Hanukkah. Joyous Kwanza. Yo. As long as you are sincere in wishing someone the best of the season, it just doesn't matter what you say. The color and design of a paper coffee cup from your favorite coffee chain does not affect the way you celebrate Christmas.

The holiday display at a government building isn't important to each of us keeping the spirit of Christmas.

It's as if the people who whine about this war on Christmas actually want us to be a bigger part of the ridiculous over-commercialization and consumer frenzy that Christmas has become. If you complain about greetings and decorations and consumer goods and the lyrics to silly holiday songs long enough and loud enough, you'll not pay attention to the revolution that actually is the Good News of Jesus' birth.

We will celebrate God coming among us very, very soon. And when Jesus shows up, we are all going to be the same. That is the revolution that is Christmas. That is the stuff Mary sings about in the Magnificat. That will be the Kingdom of God here on earth. How many times have you heard me say we are called to build the Kingdom of God right here? That is our part of the revolution of Christmas. We must start building right here. Right now.

Don't spend so much time shopping for Christmas gifts among the hordes of people out there doing the same. Go visit someone in the hospital or a care facility. Believe me...there are not hordes of people busting down those doors as if it was Wal-Mart on Black Friday. That will be revolutionary.

Don't spend as much money on gifts and travel and decorations as you had planned. Donate some of that money in your budget to a worthy charity. That is revolutionary.

Don't stress about your schedule or what food you're going to serve or getting everything done. Plan a simple evening of simple food with friends or family. Sit. Talk to and LISTEN to each other. Time is an incredibly valuable gift. Revolutionary.

Don't allow yourself to be burdened. Be joyful. Sing Christmas carols at the top of your lungs. Now THAT would be revolutionary.

Don't argue politics with family. Take your ideals and work toward making them happen. Talk is cheap. Revolutionary.

Volunteer at a shelter or soup kitchen. A revolution!

Smile at every person you encounter. Crazy, and revolutionary!

Truly live your life as if God is here among us. THAT is what Christmas is about. That is what we are about celebrate in a couple of days. Mary knew it. Mary knew that God's presence in the world would turn it upside down. And when God, who we thought was above us, is now among us - we've got no more excuses.

There are no longer differences between white and black and brown and every skin color imaginable.

There are no longer differences between men and women and people who do not identify as either.

There are no longer differences between straight and lesbian and gay and bi-sexual and transgender and those who question their identity.

There can no longer be differences between rich and poor and middle class.

There can no longer be differences between Christian and Muslim and Hindi and Buddhist and agnostics and atheists and any other belief system.

There can no longer be differences between citizen and immigrant and refugee and asylum seeker and traveler.

Christmas is a revolution. Which side are you on?