

“God’s Making Changes”

Advent 4, Series C

Luke 1:39-56

December 20, 2009

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

Tell me if you remember a story like this one, one told by Jesus. There was once an opulent old tycoon who vested himself with the finest threads from Macy’s, and who filled his belly to bursting with rib eye, lobster, and sparkling burgundy; a fat cat with a condo in the mountains, a yacht on the bay and bursting bank balances at Irving Trust. He ended up spending his eternity roasting in the fires of hell; and that scabby, penniless, crumb-picking nobody named Lazarus, who starved to death on the street in front of that tycoon’s mansion, he ended up getting “comforted” in the sweet bye and bye. Remember that story?

What an amazing reversal of conditions! A poor man with so little of this world’s material things suddenly awoke from death in the mansions of heaven with all his needs satisfied, and the man who had everything in this world suddenly awoke in hell with worse than nothing. There is something delightfully gratifying in seeing how Dives gets squeezed in hell, and how poor Lazarus finally receives compensation for all the pains he has suffered in this world.

That story fits like a glove with today’s gospel reading, the song pouring forth from the lips of Mary, the pregnant mother of our Lord when she runs to tell her cousin Elizabeth that she bears the savior of the world in her womb. She sings of how God has **“scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, brought down the powerful from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”**

We call Mary’s song the *Magnificat*, which means that Mary’s heart and soul was bursting with the good news that God had chosen her, of all people, a plain and ordinary young teenage girl from the hill country, to be the mother of the Christ, the Messiah, the long awaited king for

which Israel had longed and hoped for centuries.

When you hear the Magnificat during this Advent and Christmas season, the words are so beautiful, so soft, so lovely, you become caught up in the poetic loveliness of the cadence with the result that you may not hear how radical and revolutionary the song of Mary actually is. The well known English Bible scholar, William Barclay, says that the Magnificat is a bombshell. It takes the standards of the world and upends them. Martin Luther said that the Magnificat “comforts the lowly and terrifies the rich.” I think the Magnificat should have a warning sticker attached: “Prepare to have your life and your world turned upside down”.

What the mother of our Lord is saying is that God totally changes the order of things. God takes that which you and I put at the bottom and puts it on top. God takes what on the top and puts it on the bottom.

Young Mary, a teenager, unknown to the world of power and wealth, living in a rural village much smaller than Ellsworth—a lowly milk maid or a seamstress or some other humble worker—but she bears in her womb the very Son of God. When the time came, that babe was born, not in a hospital ward or a royal palace or plush cozy bedroom, but among the animals where his basinet was a feeding trough for sheep and goats. And among those who were the first to hear the news of the his birth were stinky shepherds who came and breathed their germs all over him.

What does this tell you about God? The God we worship has an affinity for people with minimal resources, people like poor Lazarus, and the widow who put her last coin in the temple treasury, people like the lame, the blind, the lepers, the rejected and the downtrodden. Read the scriptures, cruise through the Bible and you can’t miss it. It’s everywhere. God is attracted