

"Peace Through You"

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As a person who loves a good and creative story, I have always been fascinated with narratives of the weak and humble defeating the powerful. I love the Exodus narrative and the story of David and Goliath from the Bible; from popular culture the movies "Rocky" and "Star Wars" and from English literature "The Lord of the Rings". I especially like the character Frodo, a little and humble hobbit willing to carry such an enormous burden to save the middle earth. I always cheer for the small and not so famous team in sports, and I love how we get excited when an underdog sports team defeats the favored team.

I truly love it when the reality seems so overwhelming and the possibility to succeed is so limited that only a miracle from God can open the possibility of deliverance and salvation.

This week's Advent theme is "Peace"; Peace when it is most needed, Peace when the reality represents a crucial challenge in the life of a person, a family and a community, and Peace presented in the most fantastic and unbelievable way! Let's remember that the Gospel of Luke is a subversive Gospel of Peace written during a time of military occupation. The SALT commentary mentions that *this may be the perfect week to name and explore the realities of conflict in our lives today*. Particularly during this time of political, racial, cultural, and economic polarization, God is calling us toward greater peacemaking between peoples, groups, and individuals.

Advent is a season both to long for God's peace and to become candles of peace in the darkness.

An old Dutch woman remembered the dark days of Christmas in 1944 as Holland awaited redemption. What is it like to be a captive people, awaiting deliverance, dependent on someone, something to come from outside to save?

She said, "Each night, we secretly huddled around the wireless, eagerly hoping to receive some coded message that meant, 'invasion begun.'" We scanned the skies, looking for allied planes. People walked along the dikes, hoping to see ships on the horizon. We prayed. People in Holland were starving. The Jews were already gone. Could we endure another year of Nazi occupation?" Let's be conscious that many places worldwide and even many people in our community are experiencing the same desperation, the same sense of urgency for a change, the same eagerness for transformation and peace. Could someone respond with hope and boldness to God's call for a new invasion, an invasion of peace? Many years ago, a humble, vulnerable young woman said "Let it be with me" to God and that led to the most amazing and transformational event in human history.

Context matters

Christian author Matthew Myer says *Reading Luke's account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth in this candlelight casts it as a story of a loving God who works through relationships to turn upside down the systems and structures of the world. At the same time, it casts love and Peace as unfolding forces in history, taking shape through generations of ordinary, unexpected, often vulnerable people. Luke reiterates this theme. God's grace*

upon Mary, the divine favor by which she will bear the messianic child, is seen as an expression of a revolutionary transformation of an unjust social order. God has defeated the oppressor. God is bringing a new time of Peace, but God's plan is different. The divine had something special in mind.

After receiving the angel's wonderful news, Mary first traveled to Elizabeth's home, a sanctuary of inspiring solidarity and support. The fact that this sanctuary was in the hill country of Judea, some distance away from the more politically or prophetically prestigious cities of Jerusalem, Rome, Bethlehem, and even Nazareth, only underscores the story's central theme: God lifts the lowly, working deeds of power through supposedly powerless people and places. Luke portrays Mary as strong, poised, educated, and insightful. Mary is a young woman of vision, learning, artistry, and chutzpah. She interprets her life according to ancient divine love and action patterns, and her song encourages us to do the same.

Theological Reflection

Feminist Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether says this about Mary's place in the Christmas Story: *"Mary embodies and personifies the oppressed and subjugated people who are being liberated and exalted through God's redemptive power. She is among the humiliated ones who have been lifted up, the hungry ones who have been filled with good things." Yes, God enters history in the person of Christ to affect a liberating revolution in human relationships. Mary is exalted because God will work this revolution in history through her. Or to be more accurate, she herself, is both subject and object*

of this liberating action. She makes it possible through her act of faith, but the liberating action of God in history liberates her."

Reading the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth through the lens of this week's Advent theme of Peace is an invitation to reflect on how we as people of faith work and collaborate with God's mission to express the kingdom of God. What are Mary and other Bible characters called to follow?

The Christmas story is an epic, multigenerational story, a story of God coming to be with us and bringing a new experience of Peace, a beautiful, ancient story that insists that God's presence is a force that remakes the world.

Application

Mary, a young and humble woman said yes to God, she said "let it be with me". She sings a revolutionary song about God's revolutionary love. The story illustrates a series of recommendations for all of us to consider. Number one, when new opportunities and challenges arise, we are wise to follow Mary's example and intentionally seek out allies, forming sanctuaries of Peace, love, and mutual support. If you want to collaborate with God to establish Peace in your family, community, and the world, where can you find your allies? People of faith, let me give you an idea, your allies can be found here in the church. Come and help us bring Peace and justice to our community and the world!

Second, like Mary, let's have the courage to lift our voices! Today we can be used by God to model, speak out and declare that God has good news for everyone. The oppressor and the unjust must be denounced and exposed to the light of Jesus! How? Talk with others about what God has done in your life. Share with others the peace that

can be found in the gospel. Read the Christmas story to your family and friends. Write letters to people in power to denounce injustice in your community. Don't hesitate to raise your voice when discrimination, injustice, or evil is present in our community. I could continue with a long list of actions, but never stop and forget to sing about God's Peace during this time of advent, Christmas and always! May God bring Peace through us and may we all declare God is making all things new. Amen!