

Sermon: Advent 7

The Rev. Mike Wernick

December 23, 2018

Year C

Micah 5:2-5a

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-55

When Micah took up his pen to write this book in 735 BCE... David had been dead for almost three centuries... but David's reign would survive throughout all of Israel's history... even down to today... as the messianic model... David would come again... and his second coming would extend... [even] the empire he established long ago...

Calvin Miller... Professor of Research at Beeson Divinity School wrote that... Micah was weary with the spirit of idolatry that permeated his time... the injustice of the nation's judges... and the corruption of its priests had set a yearning in the hearts of [decent] believers to anticipate the coming of the Messiah... a new David...

The prophet's promise... though he saw only the mystical outline of things to come... was that in the closing years of what we would later call the pre-Christian era... a very small town would call the grand centers of empire... to a new idea... and this new idea... took shape... took form... took on life... in one who was young... perhaps too young... but who was not too full of the ideas and notions that would keep her from dismissing or discounting the potential she would bear and usher forth...

Episcopalians and Lutherans on the whole... don't relate to Mary the way many Roman Catholics and some other Christians do... for some... the deep reverence afforded to Mary borders on worship... but Mary is the *theotokos*... the God bearer... and it was because of her innocence... her purity... integrity... morality... decency... it was in her openness to God's will for her... that her womb was filled with God... we don't often think about it... but Mary could have said "No."... perhaps "No, Thank You."... but that would not have stopped God from finding another vessel through which to be reconciled with us...

Fr. Martin Smith writes that... *Luke presents Mary as the supreme prophetic witness... to the unwavering consistency of God's tender regard for the forgotten and discounted... but God's divine mercy also has a cutting edge of judgment...* and the *Magnificat*... sometimes sung with a tinge of human vindictiveness... is simply God's expression... through Mary... of putting the social order back into balance... Mary's rejoicing... and the rejoicing we heard about last week in Philippians... both come from the inevitability of God's justice... in the *Magnificat*... Mary summarizes salvation history... and she proclaims the promised... topsy-turvy future of God as an already-accomplished fact... in much the same way Jesus would... because that future is irresistible...

Charles Campbell writes... the coming of the Messiah who will redeem Israel... is anticipated and proclaimed... not by archangels or high priests or emperors or even ordained preachers... but rather... by two marginalized... pregnant women... one young... poor... and unwed... the other far beyond the age to conceive... two women... and their miraculous pregnancies... two women... carry the future and proclaim the Messiah...

My daughter was... in the womb... what they call in a footling breach presentation... head up... not down... and one knee up... and for a first baby... there could be no natural childbirth... she had to be delivered *via* c-section...

And when we think about all the other ways... in our time... when we think about everything that can happen during a pregnancy... and everything we can do now to ensure the best possible outcome... it becomes that much more remarkable when pregnancies unfold without incident... that's why... I think... that women know the irrepressible joy that comes from bearing new life... but it's also why women can know... as Kahlil Gibran wrote... *the pain of too much tenderness*... of a vulnerable love that knows no measure... that they would give their lives in protecting their young from every danger...

And the *Magnificat* was dangerous... and it still is... because it challenges the *status quo*... it challenges those who are too full of themselves... who hoard more than they

could ever need... while so many others are in real need... and will do almost anything to protect what they have... like the man who built more barns...

We like to think that we're done with the Tiberius'... and Pilates... and Herods... and Lysanias'... and Annas' and Caiaphas' of the world... but we're not... these days... they have different names... and wear better clothes... and may be chauffeured around... but they still hide their true motives... or lie about them... or deflect or minimize them when they're exposed... and do what they can to protect their positions of power... and their wealth... and their authority...

And apparently... the lower you are on the totem pole... and the fewer resources you have to respond to the circumstances that others create... the more you suffer... and all we need to do is watch the news for one evening... to know that the Herods and the Herodias' of the world are still with us...

That's why... when the Magnificat is fully realized... as Calvin Miller wrote... the ruthless game that tyrants have always played will come to an end... and the game is this... if I kill all my enemies... the only ones left on earth will be my friends... and the name of the game is genocide... when Hitler tried to rid himself of the Jews... this was his rationale... when the American frontiersman tried to rid themselves of the Cheyenne... when the terrible enemies of the Masai wanted to stamp them out... when the Shiites thought to eliminate the Sunni in Iraq... this was their rationale...

But when at last... the shepherd prince issues from the birth canal of mother Israel...
"God will stand and shepherd God's flock... in the strength of the Lord... in the majesty of the name of God... and they will live securely... for then God's greatness will reach to the ends of the earth... and nothing that humans can invent... but only God... will be their peace..."

Holy God... make it so...

Mike+