**Sermon Luke 1:46-55**

OPENING

We are nearing the end of this Advent season, dear friends, and we have been exploring together how hope, peace, joy and today, love can show up in our weary world. The passages we have focused on have helped us acknowledge the range of emotions, burden and sorrows we are all carrying with us throughout this season:

tiredness AND hopeful excitement,

frustration AND moments of peace,

sadness AND glimmers of joy,

loneliness, AND the warmth of a loving community.

It’s all there when we enter into this place and time of worship. So, let’s pray together to the One who sees us clearly and loves us fully just as we are:

O God of Mary, time and time again you reliably come alongside the weary. Do so again this morning, so that we might be filled with expectancy for a world that is coming, is here and is yet to come. A world where the lowly are lifted up and the hungry are filled with good things. Give us eyes to see what is not yet visible and ears to hear what is good this Advent. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

You likely don’t need me to list all the potential personal factors, and those in our communal life together, that can make us feel weary. Especially not this year, as we prepare to tell the story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, which is less than 50 miles from the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Palestinian Christian leaders made the decision a few weeks ago, right after the 7-day ceasefire ended, to suspend all activities and public celebrations for Christmas, as long as a state of war continues.

This past Tuesday, December 12 the 193-member UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, with 23 counties abstaining and 10 countries voting against, including Israel and our very own United States. Are we not weary of war? Are we not weary of witnessing the destruction of more than 18,000 Palestinians, the majority of them women and children.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Surely, *we* are, and yet I am mindful that what we are witnessing in the very land in which our sacred text and our nativity story is set is a weariness from which there is little to no relief. A weariness that is likely more familiar to Mary, than it is to us. Whose privilege can protect us from true weariness or cloud our judgment about the difference between weariness and annoyance, or inconvenience, or irritation over the small interruptions of our lives.

But Mary, who lived on the margins of society, by virtue of her gender, marital status, and ethnicity…likely knew weariness from which there is little relief.

LINK

And not just Mary.

The Gospel of Luke starts out with the stories of people who are all waiting and weary. Zechariah and Elizabeth are waiting and weary. Mary is waiting and weary. Simeon and Anna, at the end of Luke chapter 2, when Jesus is presented at the temple, are waiting and weary. And what is clear in these Gospel stories, and is true also for numerous stories in the Hebrew scripture, is that the starting place for a human’s encounter with the Divine is often one of weariness.

So, come all you who are weary and downtrodden and let me invite you to meditate on Mary’s song of radical imagination. The Magnificat. It is a glimpse into one girl’s relationship with the Divine. It is an expression of hope against hope, peace against peace, joy against joy, love against love. It reveals the human capacity –in one so young and vulnerable– to see beyond the wearisome events of her present, and into the mysterious possibilities of the future. Mary is a prophet, a beacon for us all.

THE TEXT

Mary offers us what *she* knows to be the truths about our Creator, in the midst of her own season of uncertainty. Mary was in a precarious situation with her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Who would believe her if she said the baby was from God? So, perhaps as an escape and perhaps seeking support from another woman, Mary travelled about 90 miles to see her older relative, Elizabeth.

Anxious and uncertain, Mary may have felt ashamed, even though she had done nothing wrong, and certainly the usual exhaustion and hormonal upheaval of early pregnancy. She may have wondered whether Joseph would accept her. Whether she would be ostracized by the community and whether she would be good enough to mother this child.

Elizabeth probably had her own concerns about *surviving* her pregnancy and delivery. And providing adequate care for a baby at her age. When Mary arrives at her home. Elizabeth feels her owns unborn baby move and she interprets this as a sign that her baby recognizes Mary’s baby. Elizabeth discerns that Mary has been chosen for something important and announces that Mary and her child have been *blessed*, which means ‘spoken well off.’ Supportive words at a time when Mary may have desperately needed the assurance and affirmation.

Elizabeth knows that no matter how weary Mary feels, she is loved by God and belovéd of God.

And perhaps that affirmation –God’s favor, of God love –helps Mary to find her voice and her confidence to proclaim that *our Creator*does not dismiss, forget, or push aside those like her. And so, she responds to Elizabeth with this stunning song, maybe they sing together.

It is called the Magnificat because it begins: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” It is not a sweet lullaby, but a song of praise to the God who is turning the world upside down. Mary sings that “God has looked with favor on the lowliness of [God’s] servant,” because in the world’s eyes, Mary is young, female, and poor, and yet God has chosen to do a radical new thing in her, to take on flesh and enter the world.

Mary’s song announces an astounding reversal of fortunes. It is a revolutionary song. A song of protest, that “God will bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly.” That “the hungry will be filled and the rich will be emptied.”

AND in this moment, Mary feels the world’s balance shift

*toward* the poor and the lowly,

*away* from the rich and the powerful.

Mary had already said YES to God, AND HERE she says a resounding NO to oppression.

This young pregnant teen has a spirit that is so moved by the deep abiding knowledge of her belovédness that she begins to exalt the Creator for *their* holiness and the way in which *they* have blessed her, loved her, seen her and her circumstance.

Everything society has told her about herself and her worth, as an unwed young mother-to-be in occupied territory *is a lie*. For although her weariness does not magically evaporate, nor do her days of suffering come to an end, in her heart she knows that the world *can* be different, and that it *should* be different.

APPLICATION

Many of us live with this sense today, but this sense is experienced differently depending on your position in society. Everything feels heavier when you’re marginalized: looking for work, losing work, searching for community, losing community, finding opportunities, and losing opportunities. People with more advantages in life may experience the same thing, but their privilege protects them from experiencing as heavy a blow.

Not everyone experiences the sense that the world needs to change in the same way. Some of us see it all around us, while some of us have to put in the effort to look and listen for it. Those who are *waiting and weary* are those who have experienced pain and suffering, oppression and marginalization. Those who are *waiting and weary* are intimately aware of the ways the world needs to change. Those who are *waiting and weary* are the one’s whose senses are heighten to the work of the Divine in this world.

Praising the God of the Magnificat requires *us* to be in solidarity with those who have been waiting and weary, the lowly and hungry of our world today, wherever we find them. And that solidarity must be firmly maintained until liberation is achieved. This is what it means to put the promise of Advent into action.

LINK

Mary’s revolutionary song symbolizes a posture to the world, predicated on the belief that the way the world is set up *can* be changed–and it *should* be changed. What would our spiritual practices, or our churches, or our liturgy look like in service to the God praised in the Magnificat?

CONCLUSION

Feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a professor of Sloane’s actually, explains tha the focus of Mary’s song isn’t resentment, but action. Fiorensa says, “In the Magnificat, the pregnant Mary enunciates [or expresses clearly] God’s salvation and well-being to the humiliated and downtrodden. The future of God’s well-being for all without exception is not to be awaited passively. It is being born among us today, from our flesh and blood, from our commitments and struggles for justice. It becomes born as the hope for those who are without hope.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Peace for those who are amidst war, joy for those whose day is filled with mourning, and LOVE for those whose lives are treated as disposable.

Mary is a prophet.

She understands and is convinced of the tenacity of hope, the power of peace, immovability of joy and the liberation that can come from being loved by God and showing love to others. “This is the light at the end of the tunnel. This is the way to combat the weariness that is glimpse of something different that helps to sustain us during the weary times and grants us the opportunity to rejoice.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Must we stay weary this season? No, certainly not. Instead, must we rush to joy and celebration before we are ready? No, not that, either. But it is possible to hold onto two seemingly conflicting emotions at the same time. This Advent perhaps held onto weariness, and our practice may *not* be to let it go, to push it aside or be passively weary, necessarily, or to convince ourselves to “cheer up because it’s almost Christmas,” but to listen and learn in our waiting, and perhaps we will discover that from that weariness we might find words and reason to be called to action and rejoice in a God who has chosen to come among the weary and do something new.

If you are looking for a way to do that in community this week, I encourage you to attend The Winter Solstice Service on Thursday evening. Perhaps look to how you can advocate for ceasefire in Israel and Palestine. Perhaps find opportunities to volunteer to distribute food to those who are hungry, winter coats to those who are cold and extend friendship to those who are lonely.

As we head into this next week on the run up to Christmas together, we *will* hold weariness before us, and through scripture and song, we will find joy, hope, peace and loving connection not despite our acknowledgement of our weariness but perhaps because of it.

May it be so. Amen.

1. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/un-general-assembly-votes-overwhelmingly-in-favour-of-gaza-ceasefire> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Commentary throughout sermon from Rev. Cecelia D. Armstrong from “A Sanctified Art” Advent Worship Planning Series. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)