

**Sermon: Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary**  
**Scripture: Luke 1:46-55 - The Magnificat -**  
**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**  
**Date: December 10, 2023**

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The words we are listening to the choir sing this morning are from Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In case you haven't noticed:

This is not Mary of the blue dress and delicate white head scarf.

This is not Mary meek and mild and demure.

This is not Mary of tender stem from whom the rose springs.

This is not Mary whom we hail, prayerful and full of grace.

The Mary who speaks these words recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the Mother of Jesus, is Mary of a revolution, a subversive Mary, a radical Mary, as fierce as she is young, bold and courageous, and as a result a dangerous Mary.

We've tried to put her in her place, to make her youthful, naive, innocent, pretty, soft - we've quieted her and placed her in a silent and holy night. We've surrounded her with barnyard animals. We've bent her knees to kneeling for creches, cocked her head in a delicate pose of adoration of her little baby and placed a strong standing Joseph behind her. We've placed a glowing halo of light around her head and made her skin lily white and her hair blond and her figure shapely, all to take the teeth out of these first words she speaks.

Because the carols written and the sermons preached and the paintings painted across the centuries have usually been created for or commissioned by the proud power holders, those with great means, the keepers of the way-things-are who benefit from the way-things-are. And

they have not wanted a Mary who stands bold and strong, lifts her head and proclaims “he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted the poor and lowly, filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty.” That’s a Mary quite contrary, a revolutionary Mary, not a Mary meek and mild and acceding to the way things are.

But you should know that the radical nature of Mary’s Magnificat has not been lost across the ages. Dietrich Bonhoeffer sat in a Nazi prison cell in Germany for having plotted against Hitler and he said of the Magnificat - “Mary’s song is at once the most passionate, most revolutionary Advent song ever sung.” And the Magnificat was banned in British colonial India and in Guatemala and Argentina when it was being recited by mothers of the disappeared in the 80’s and during the Dirty War years, those governments banned it from public recitation because they were only too aware of the revolutionary nature of what Mary was proclaiming, a rallying cry for an overturning oppressive social systems, a cry against the exploitation of the poor.

This was not Mary’s idea. She stood in a long tradition that understood the revelation of God to be particularly focused on the poor, oppressed, exploited, the abused and overburdened, those on the underside of society. It was not Mary’s idea. She was just courageous enough to proclaim it as she saw it and knew it and suddenly was experiencing it; that this God revealed Godself first to a people owned by others, a God who cared about the enslaved while no one else in the world did, a God who came to suffering slaves first to offer salvation, a this worldly salvation through liberation from the shackles that bound them.

And so it shouldn't have been surprising to those who had been following God's activities up to this point, that God's further revelation wouldn't come to mansions and palaces and great halls of power, to Kings and Queens and Landholders, but to a poor woman of no repute... and in fact seriously questionable repute after God's visitation.

This is how God comes first of all, for the liberation of those crushed and destitute and oppressed. Mary's song makes that clear. Mary, the OG Christian subversive woman too bold for her position, too puffed up for her place, too brash for her status keeps insisting and persisting that "God will scatter the proud and put down the mighty from their seats and lift the lowly and fill the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty!"

And in this way Mary models and teaches and paves the way for her brave and bold son Jesus' coming which is a coming...

Not so much to the influencers as to the neglected,

Not to the wall builders but to the desperate border crossers,

Not to those who over-profit from mistreatment of labor but to the laborers,

Not so much to those who know how to work the system for their benefit but to those who get worked over by the system,

Not to those who have everything going for them but to those who seem to have everything stacked against them.

Not to the silencers but to the silenced.

"I have come not to those who are in no need of a physician but to those who are sick." (Mark 2:17)

To lift up the lowly. And to put down the proud. Those are God's paths for us to salvation, to liberation. The lowly are lifted up, the higher ups are lowered down. But that's the thing, it's harder for the higher ups to

accept the lowering down than it is for the lowly to accept being raised up, isn't it? Which is why maybe God chose one such as Mary to fulfill his purposes and why Jesus chose the disciples he did for his.

So raise your head, you lowly of spirit and bow your head you proud of heart for the Lord is coming and this is how He comes.