

Sermon Response Guide - November 26, 2023
"Mary's Song" Luke 1:46-55
Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

Antoine de Saint- Exupery, the author of *The Little Prince*, writes, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Exupery is naming something very significant about what it means to be a human being. We are directed by our longings, and driven by what we love. If we are going to experience a change in life, our hearts need to be captured by a new vision for what it really means to flourish as a human being.

Like Mary, in our text today, the gospel must capture the center of our being. Our soul needs to come to a place where it glorifies the Lord. Our spirit must come to a place where we truly rejoice in the salvation of God. Christianity cannot be reduced to a set of ethical tasks and works. We need to learn to long for the immensity of God's goodness!

The problem is that we are often driven and directed by disordered desires. We have been formed to long after the idols of this world rather than God. C.S. Lewis has famously observed,

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We need a reorientation of what we love and desire. To facilitate this reorientation, we need to look at what it is we worship. We need to be immersed in a repertoire of music that directs our heart toward the life of abundance that is found in Christ. For the next four weeks we are going to meditate on the songs of Advent that show up in Luke 1 and 2. We are going to allow these first followers of Jesus to lead us in worship. As we immerse ourselves in these songs, I pray that we would grow in our capacity to desire God.

We begin today by looking at Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. These are profound lyrics coming from a young teenager. They are also surprising lyrics considering Mary's situation in life. She is socially and economically vulnerable as an unwed mother-to-be. She is also living in a time of political turmoil. She is living as a religious minority during the brutal reign of Herod the Great. Yet, Mary sees a bigger storyline at work through it all. Where does this song emerge from? How is she able to see through the bleakness of her current reality toward a hopeful future?

Mary sees hope in the midst of hardship because of her immersion in scripture. Almost every line from this song is a scripture reference. R.T. France writes that this song is "a collage of echoes of psalms and other poetic sections of the Old Testament." Numerous lines are pulled directly from Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, where Hannah dedicates her son Samuel

to the Lord. Other lines come directly from the psalms. Mary has been deeply formed by the songs of scripture. She has developed what one writer calls a "psalmic consciousness." Her years of praying the scriptures have sharpened her insight into what God is like, and how God intervenes in history.

This poses a very practical consideration for us. What is forming our consciousness? What is shaping our longings and desires? My concern is that our consciousness is being shaped by our immersion in the narratives of our world. What might it look like to form a psalmic consciousness instead of a Fox News consciousness or a MSNBC consciousness or a TikTok consciousness?

Notice what Mary sees. She sees a God who is mindful of her. God takes notice of Mary in her humble and vulnerable state. During the first few verses of the song, Mary is using personal language. She addresses God as "my savior." She says "Generations will call me blessed." She goes on to celebrate that "He has done great things for me." The new spiritual reality that Christ has come to usher in, changes things for us personally. We discover a new identity, a new calling, a new hope in Christ.

God has also come to bring about a corporate revolution in the world around her. The rest of the song speaks of a bigger story that includes her but also transcends her. The focus shifts to the way God is at work bringing good news to the poor and the oppressed.

Mary anticipates a theme that will be central to the mission of Jesus. Jesus cares for the oppressed and the hungry. His kingdom is going to bring about a role reversal. Those who are proud, powerful, and rich will be brought down, and those who are humble, weak, and poor will be lifted up.

This is good news indeed. Though, I wonder if it causes some dissonance for those of us who read this story from a position of relative wealth, power, and privilege. There are particular spiritual risks for those who are rich and well off. We can be lulled into a false sense of security or superiority. The rich are sent away empty because they are already full. They have no room for God to enter in. The proud and mighty are brought down because they do not think they need help.

God is a mighty savior who has come to fill us with good things, and lift us up. We can either humbly receive it or arrogantly resist it. He fills the poor and lifts up the meek because they are receptive and ready to receive. That is why, as Thomas Merton writes, "Christ always seeks the straw of the most desolate cribs to make his Bethlehem."

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon this week?
2. What is shaping your longings and desires right now?
3. Do you notice any disordered desires at work in your life right now? Where are you, in Lewis' words, "far too easily pleased?"
4. If you were going to write a song of praise to God, what blessings would you include?
5. How can we cultivate a more receptive and humble posture towards God?