

As I sat down and read the four scriptures that we just heard, I was conflicted in which direction that I wanted to go. There was a temptation to stay in the Second Readings as I have done the past two weeks because the Hebrews text. The Hebrews text offers us an opportunity to receive encouragement on our spiritual journey.

Then, as I looked deeper at all four texts, I loved the words of Elizabeth Johnson when she says, *“The whole sweep of salvation history seems to be played out in these texts that point to God’s promise of redemption and breathe confidence that God can be trusted to keep those promises.”*

I am an individual that loves when all four passages are truly tied together and they definitely do that this week.

But, the Luke’s passage is an extremely popular passage and within the text that we read; it contains Mary’s Song. A song that is close to so many people’s hearts. So, I decided that I would lean into the song but I am going to expound on songs. In doing so, I may find myself in some hot water after the sermon concludes, but I am opening to push open some doors that maybe haven’t been opened before.

The summer of 1990 was a summer like no other for me. I had just graduated from high school and my home church for my graduation blessed me with a gift trip to the United Kingdom. Hey, every church gives their graduating seniors that type of a gift; right?

The trip did have a dual purpose. The first purpose was for me to attend the 21st World Convention of Christian Endeavor in Coventry, England. Sitting in worship with 10,000+ people from all over the world was an amazing experience. Following the convention, I did a two-week mission trip in Newport Wales. I cannot recall too much of the work that we did: we did some community meals; a clean up project and did a kid care club meet up; but what I do remember and was fascinated with was who I was with on the journey.

I was on the trip with about twenty students whose ages ranged from 18-25 who were all from Germany. They are the ones who ruined my love for fish, but that is a different story. A short nine-months before I met them, the Berlin wall had fallen and some of them showed the pieces of the wall that they had grabbed. They participated in some of the protests and then was there when the wall came down. In high school, history really was not my cup of tea, but listening to them and seeing an actual piece of history was pretty cool.

Later in life, I began to appreciate History a little more. Thank-you, Dr. Lusby. Dr Lusby came out of retirement to teach history at Kentucky Christian College when I was a freshman. He was 75 years young. We did give him a hard time and joked that he was teaching us history first hand. But, back on point.

I learned that in 1989, the protesters in Leipzig sang. Yes, the protesters sang. The protesters would gather on Monday nights around St. Nikolai church and sing.

Now, let me take you back seven years. Starting in November 1982, people came together to pray for peace every Monday in the St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig. These meetings were initiated by the Evangelical Office for Young People in the state of Saxony in the GDR. The initiators and participants of these weekly meetings wanted to demonstrate their resistance against the build-up of nuclear weapons by the East and the West in the Cold War. The prayers for peace also offered a platform where people could express their hopes and fears. Because there was no space in the GDR for open political debate, people used this hybrid of a political event and a worship service for this purpose.

Then, the Monday demonstrations officially began on September 4, 1989. Directly after praying for peace in the St. Nicholas Church, a crowd of people gathered together to demonstrate for freedom and civil rights. Their main demand was for an improvement of the living conditions in the GDR. The number of demonstrators grew rapidly: In the course of two months, the initial number of 1,000 demonstrators increased to 20,000, and by October 9, 1989 it had swelled to 70,000.

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And to close out this history lesson, peaceful demonstrations modeled after the one in Leipzig were also held in other parts of the GDR. On November 4, 1989 the biggest demonstration in the history of the GDR, with about a million participants, took place in Berlin. The Berlin Wall came down five days later, and less than a year later this was followed by the reunification of East and West Germany.

The country came together singing songs of hope, and protest and justice. Their song shook the power of their nation and changed the world.

Later, an East German secret police was asked why they did not crush the protest, you know, like you did so many before. His response, “We had no contingency plan for song.”

Another thing that I have heard about history is history repeats itself. I give the 1989 history lesson in my sermon, because if we travel two thousand years back into history; we see Mary and Elizabeth protesting through song.

Mary and Elizabeth.

I want you to think for a moment about their situations. Elizabeth is too old to bear a child. Mary is so young that she is not yet married. Yet, both of them are called by God to bear children. God has promised them that their children will change the world. Mary’s life was hard and being under Roman oppression made it more difficult. Mary, specifically, had many options. She could have apologized. She could have retreated. She could have stayed in a state of despair. However, she did none of that. She sang a song.

The song was a powerful song. It was an in-your-face song whether we want to realize it or not. She was resisting. She sang boldly. She had confidence in the Lord’s promise. The promise was to upend the powers. A movement was set into place that was going to reverse the fortunes of an unjust world.

This is powerful stuff.

Mary sung about the oppressed, which she was one of, being lifted up. From Mary to Berlin, one of the most powerful things that you can do when your back is up against the wall and life looks grim is to sing.

There are many examples of this. One of the more powerful examples of this in recent history was when individuals came together after the Sandy Hook killings and they sang “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”. Tears ran down their face as they sang:

Disperse the gloom clouds of night

And death’s dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Then Gracia Grindal penned an Advent hymn that many churches use and, in her song, there is a line that states, “*we light the Advent candles **against** the winter light.*” Word usage is very important and she purposely chose against. She did not choose because of or during. The reason for this is the following:

She wanted to remind individuals that the lights of Advent, like the lights of Christ is a genuine protest to and resistance of the darkness that gathers all around us.

There seems to be so much darkness around us. For some of us, it is dealing with the sickness of family members. For some of us, it is death that has occurred to our family members or friends and as we are in the week of Christmas; knowing that we will not see their faces. Then this does not even begin to touch the darkness that we are seeing when we turn on the news. Our world is hurting.

The songs that we sing, rather they be Advent or Christmas songs help us. These songs combine the realism of our reality in one hand and the promise of Christ in the other hand. These can help us counterpoint the darkness that we are experiencing. They can bring us hope and isn’t that what we all need. I am hoping that this hope is what draws us to church.

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Speaking of drawing us to church. Being part of the church worship experience is part of our affirmations. By the end of Year C, maybe you will be tired of hearing the affirmations. But, I am going to continue to lift them up each week and this week the affirmation of “living among God’s faithful people” seems so appropriate.

Back to Mary and Elizabeth for a brief moment; as it may tie into our affirmation. Mary visiting Elizabeth could be considered the first gathering of the community of Jesus. I think that if we step back and reflect on their meet-up, we can be reminded how much we need each other. It is so vital for us to be together and draw fresh courage from one another. We then also need to celebrate just like Mary & Elizabeth. Let us celebrate all that we share as bearers of the promises together.

Let me close with one last look at Mary and a challenge to us. Mary was a prophet. She shared the good news everywhere she went. If we want to reuse the word of bearers, she was continuously out bearing God’s word in the places that she was sent.

Everyone in this space today and online can be “God-bearers.” We can all allow God’s word to be inscribed on our hearts and lives. We can all carry out God’s love and God’s longing for justice; in every place we go. If you accept the challenge, be warned that your world will be turned upside down. Alison Sampson says it so well; when she says, *“Opening ourselves to God, offering ourselves up in perfect obedience, will catapult us out of the comfortable, the familiar, the known, and throw us into situations and places where we will find ourselves challenging the dominant powers and narratives of the world.”*

Will you have the courage to pray Mary’s prayer?

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” **Amen.**