

December 20<sup>th</sup> 2009

Sermon

Luke 1:39-55

The Magnificat

Servanthood is relational:

I am a baby boomer. I grew up in that time of the 50's and 60's that are bookmarked by Ozzie and Harriet and the Vietnam war. Talk about having to grapple with identity! On the teen side of all this during the time of Ozzie and Harriet, American Bandstand and the ageless Dick Clark, the Mickey Mouse Club and Spin and Marty...the worst thing that could happen to a girl was that she'd suddenly find herself "with child." That was huge! The stigma attached to a girl was so negative that the old mores of shunning, gossiping, judging all came into play...especially in a small town. And, I grew up in a small town. Some left town to strike out on their own; others went to live with a favored aunt some distance away; some had what was referred to as a shotgun wedding. No matter what, the path was a difficult one to negotiate.

Then along came the call to serve in a place called Vietnam. Almost overnight weddings were taking place on very short notice, and being with child out of wedlock was more commonplace, especially in a small town. And, I grew up in a small town.

I've been reflecting on all this for weeks now. How it was to be with child out of wedlock in a small town two thousand years ago and in our more contemporary time.... although many would say that the 50's and 60's isn't contemporary, but ancient. Here was our Mary—destined to be the model for all of motherhood, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ— with child and not married. **She** was not only excited, but her family, her cousin Elizabeth was excited. Matter of fact Elizabeth was also with child, although not out of wedlock. She was just "old." No blame and shame here! What a contrast! Of course, most of the girls I grew up with didn't have an angel come to tell them they had found favor with God; that the Holy Spirit was coming upon them and they would bear a son by God; that the power of the Most High would overshadow them and therefore, the child to be born would be called holy, the Son of God. Gabriel gave Mary the broad strokes of God's

plan, providing really only one detail—that she shall call his name, Jesus. Of course, in retrospect we see the plan was pretty well defined, but I’ll bet Mary didn’t think so at the time any more than the girls of the 50’s and 60’s who didn’t have a clue about what all this would mean either. I’m not making light of either situation....neither the one in which I grew up, nor of Mary’s. I’m certain Mary’s time was a struggle in many ways, even with the assurance her faith brought her along with a visitation by the angel Gabriel. And, I know first hand the struggle friends of mine had and how it has informed the rest of their lives. I am just reflecting on the difference of how the news of being with child changed their lives, and how they responded to the news of imminent parenthood.

We know very little about Mary’s parents. Their names were Anna and Joachim. It is thought they were **also** beyond the years of child-bearing, but prayed and fasted that God would grant their desire for a child. And, God did. Given this, we can make the leap that Mary grew up in a faith-filled family,... that she herself was filled with faith and love for God. Let’s agree that Mary had a relationship with God, a loving relationship with God. Even Elizabeth says “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” Without relationship she wouldn’t have found herself visited by Gabriel, favored by God to bear the Son of God, and believing in the fulfillment of God’s word. Mary willingly accepts what God has in store for her, however that may play out because she is a faithful servant of God, and she believes. She says to Gabriel “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Mary sings to God: -----

These words reflect the assurance of relationship! Being a servant, “a devoted and helpful follower, a supporter” requires relationship. Mary models this behavior for us with God. She also models it with Jesus. Jesus models it for us with his disciples. Everything we do in service whether to God, Jesus or to our fellow brothers and sisters on this earth ought to be relational. This is where we need to move out of what is, into the world of “ought to be.”

I hear so many times “I’m not worthy” to serve; to be loved by God; to talk with God....you fill in the blank. This just simply is not true! God gifted us all with the opportunity to be in relationship with God. That opportunity is renewed each day, each moment. If God thinks we are worthy, who are we to reject the gift? It’s my belief that much of the disconnect in our world comes from lack of relationship with God, Jesus, the Divine and all her beings that surround us to whom we seem to turn a blind eye and deaf ear. If I don’t leave you with anything else I’d like to leave you with the knowledge that relationship with God is not only possible, but that God deeply desires us to be intimate with God as we individually know and understand God to be. This is the time! God needs us to be in relationship with God, and God needs to be in relationship with us. I’m talking about opening up and creating space for God to move into....in our bodies, minds, hearts and souls. God needs us every day, not just on Sunday. God needs us to put God first. Everything else will fall into place exactly according to God’s plan when that happens. And, God needs us to serve all of humankind, not just our faith communities, families and friends. God needs us to be the hands and feet, hearts and minds, spirits and souls that Jesus so profoundly modeled for everyone during his lifetime. Praying morning, noon and night is great! But, that’s not how some are destined to live. We aren’t all called to a monastic life. But, we can invite God into the nooks and crannies of our being, asking God to abide in us and then.....then to behave as though we know God will accept exactly as we have invited. Without the faith of knowing that we are worthy and that God dwells within us, without that profound knowing, the invitation to abide in us is empty. Everything we do should be relational and in love for and with God. People say “I can’t be in love with God.” Of course, we can! Mystics through the ages know about being in love with God and God being in love with us. They are very vocal in their expression of that love. Mary sang to God her praise of God’s love for her. She opened her heart, mind and body to serve God—and look at how God honored her willingness to serve. We are no less than she. God only knows what is in store for our lives if we fulfill our relationship with God. In God nothing is impossible, but we’ve got to start someplace. It really matters not who or what we’ve done or been up to this moment. God is waiting for the invitation into relationship—deep abiding, intimate relationship. You want to help your fellow journeyer’s on this earth, around this world? Begin where the

root lies. Strengthen your relationship with God, with Jesus, with Mary, mother of all mothers and all the Divine beings surrounding you...waiting to be invited into you. Speak the invitation out loud so you can hear the invitation being given. Be intentional. Then, behave as if you know the invitation will be accepted. Step outside yourself. Work for the greater good. Serve in the way Jesus served the world in which he lived, serving God as he served all people! Without relationship with God we are less than God created us to be. We simply cannot live a serving life without the nourishing presence of the love of God every moment in our lives. And, we can't be fully present to those we serve if we're not in relationship with both them and with God. Jesus showed us how to do this. Mary showed us how to do this. Will we continue to ignore the lessons, or are we willing to change things, this day...this moment.....coming into full relationship with all creation and our creator in order to serve the world?

I can't say that life won't be successful if the choice is made not to be relational with God. I can't say anything about your lives. I only know that for what I've wanted in my life which has been to make a difference and serve others, fulfilling my full potential relationship with God has been a must. I'm also here to share that it's not only possible, but what God desires. Listen or not as we have all done thru the ages. But, the truth is.....God is relational and we **are all worthy**.

This is all real stuff, you know...this God stuff. I think too often we believe it won't matter if we get distracted, let our minds wander and spend our time being self indulgent. We lose sight of God-- out of sight, out of mind. In these few days leading up to the celebration of the birth of Jesus please know that if you don't believe in the mystical presence of God and Jesus and all of the Divine and her beings, you can trust in the facts. God created, Jesus came, Mary wept, and the world has never been the same. For those who believe, know that God and the Son of God are waiting to be invited into each and every body and soul to fulfill the relationship prophesied thru the ages and the promise made manifest upon the birth of Christ. Amen.