

## Is God Waiting For Us?

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Congregational Church of Austin, UCC  
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Third Sunday of Advent  
Luke 1: 46-56

When I read today's passage, Mary praising God, I don't read it literally, but mythically. I don't believe God is a mighty supernatural being who removes mighty people from their thrones, and feeds hungry people good things while sending rich people away empty-handed.

For me, this passage uses vivid imagery to make strong value judgments on human qualities and behaviors, deeming them either godly or ungodly, holy or unholy, sacred or sacrilegious. That's to say, deeming them either in service to life, beneficial to life's healthy flourishing, or harmful to life, oppressive to life, life-sucking. With vivid imagery, godly human qualities and deeds are opposed to ungodly human qualities and behaviors.

Mary, in whom a child, her son, is now taking shape, takes center stage in this passage, so let's consider her for a moment.

Mary is of low estate. Low status. Mary is a lower-class woman living in a strongly patriarchal culture in a small oppressed nation colonized by a giant empire. Those qualities, in part, account for her low estate.

But Mary embodies another quality that accounts for her low estate. Her humility.

Mary doesn't consider herself better than others, better than *anyone*. Mary doesn't speak to anyone or treat anyone in a way that communicates—your status is lower than mine. Which puts Mary at the bottom, because there's no one she considers below her.

Now a woman who's oppressed by class, patriarchy, and empire can still be arrogant. She can still consider certain others below her and treat them in a haughty manner. Control them, oppress them, exploit them. Even the poor and the oppressed have a pecking order, with those who peck, and those who get pecked.

But Mary doesn't play that game.

Mary doesn't have an arrogant or haughty bone in her body.

Mary embodies humility.

And humility is a godly, holy, sacred quality.

Which makes Mary godly, holy, sacred.

Like mother, like son.

I've come to see humility as the most significant trait that Jesus embodies and teaches. Many people see Jesus as a teacher of love, some as a teacher of wisdom, but I see him primarily as a teacher of humility. Of course love, wisdom, and humility are deeply intertwined. Is Jesus a loving and wise teacher of humility, or a humble teacher of love and wisdom? Place your emphasis where you want.

At any rate, Mary, member of an oppressed class, an oppressed gender, and an oppressed nation, birthmother of Jesus, embodies humility. No one is beneath her.

Like mother, like son. Godly.

Mary embodies humility, but let's not confuse humility with resigned submission to the way things are in this life. Mary knows how the cards are stacked and dealt. She knows who has power and status, and who doesn't, and why.

Mary has a defiant streak, a holy impulse to resist domination, so she speaks out, and names the ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious qualities and behaviors that harm life, oppress life, and suck life out of the living.

Arrogance. That's the first ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious quality Mary names.

Arrogance. The opposite, the antithesis of humility.

When Mary's soul magnifies the Lord, when Mary's soul magnifies what's godly, she calls out and opposes what's ungodly. Humility calls out and opposes arrogance.

Scatter those who're arrogant in the thoughts of their hearts.

Arrogant hearts think arrogant thoughts that become arrogant attitudes, arrogant expressions, arrogant behaviors. Arrogance is highly toxic, it poisons the entire human who feeds on it.

Arrogance, and its inexhaustible human expressions, its countless ways of looking down one's nose at others, and closing one's heart to those below, is ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious. That's what Mary is saying.

Human arrogance harms life, oppresses life, sucks life out of the living. I think that's one of the central teachings of not just Mary's song but the entire Bible—human arrogance harms life, and is therefore ungodly.

What's the root cause of human-caused climate disruption, eco-system destruction, and species extinction?

I'd put human arrogance at the top of the list.

Arrogance, the opposite, the antithesis of humility.

Arrogance. For me, the opposite, the antithesis of the most important godly, holy, sacred trait Mary and her child, Jesus, embodied and magnified—humility.

Scatter the arrogant in the thoughts of their hearts. Disperse the arrogant.

The more arrogant hearts converge, and the more arrogant thoughts conspire, the more tightly-knit, concentrated, and powerful arrogance becomes.

The more concentrated and powerful arrogance becomes, the more ungodly, unholy, and sacrilegious arrogance becomes.

The more concentrated and powerful arrogance becomes, the more harmful, oppressive, and life-sucking arrogance becomes.

Scatter those most poisoned by arrogance. Those who're converging, conspiring, and concentrating their arrogance into a powerful force that's harming people's lives and damaging the earth. Disperse them.

Bring down the dynasts from their thrones.

Well there's your concentrated power. Dynasties.

Unbridled economic capital, political capital, social and cultural capital, plus power, plus arrogance, concentrated into a few hands, into a few families, into a few political parties, into a few corporations, translates into dynasty.

And once a dynasty is in control, its number one goal is to stay in control, whatever it takes.

Dynasties are how a few humans dominate lots of humans, in lots of ways.

Dynasties harm, oppress, and suck the life from the living.

Dynasties are ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious.

Bring down the dynasts from their thrones. Dethrone the few who dominate the many, their domination is ungodly, unholy, sacrilegious. Pull down those who sit in lofty places, and look down upon the rest with closed hearts.

Lift up the lowly. Here we return to the godly, holy, and sacred.

Lift up the lowly.

Lift up those who think themselves lower than you. Let them know, in no uncertain terms—you are not lower than me, I am no better than you.

Lift up those who think themselves lower than the arrogant. Let them know, in no uncertain terms—you are not lower than the arrogant, you are not lower than any other person.

Lift up the lowly and exalt humility.

Exalt humility. Revere humility. Magnify humility—the godly trait.

Walk humbly with your God, the prophet Micah said. Walk humbly, walk godly.

Again, like mother, like son.

Jesus exalts humility, reveres humility, magnifies humility. Jesus walks the godly walk.

Fill the hungry with good things.

Fill the hungry. Another godly, holy, sacred trait.

For what do the hungry hunger? Food.

But there are lots of different types of hunger, and lots of different types of food.

For what does the human heart most deeply hunger?

For what does the human mind most deeply hunger?

For what does the human soul most deeply hunger?

What happens when the human heart's deepest hunger goes unfed?

When the human mind's deepest hunger goes unfed?

The human soul's?

Can human hearts starve? Can human minds? Human souls?

I think there are lots of hungry human hearts in the world, lots of hungry human minds, lots of hungry human souls. Some starving. And let's not forget human stomachs.

Filling the hungry with goodness is a godly, holy, sacred act.

Filling hungry stomachs, hungry hearts, hungry minds, and hungry souls here on earth is doing God's work here on earth.

Send the rich away empty. There's an interesting godly trait.

Send the rich away empty. I read that as, set firm limits on the rich.

If the rich can't self-regulate their own behavior and take only what they need, if the rich can't say no to their own desires, then the rest must place regulations on the rich, and say no to them.

Don't let the rich set the terms on what they take, and how much they take, and how they take it. Prevent those who have far more than they need, and far more than their share, from taking any more. Send them away without any more.

That's a godly, holy, sacred act—setting limits on people's behavior when their behavior is harming life, oppressing life, and sucking life out of the living.

That's a godly, holy, sacred act—saying no, no more for you, to those who have too much already, more than their share.

Of course, you can only send the rich away empty if the rich are no longer in control, if the rich no longer dominate through their dynasties, if the concentrated power of arrogance has been dispersed. But we've already covered that godly act—ending and dispersing the arrogant dynastic concentrations of wealth and power.

Pretty radical stuff.

It sounds a lot like what Jesus calls, the kingdom of God.

Like mother, like son. Godly mother, godly son.

Do we await a mighty supernatural being to do these godly things for us on earth?

Or are we to achieve these godly tasks on earth?

By exalting humility. By walking humbly with God, not only talking a godly talk, but walking a godly walk. Embodying a godly way of living, a holy and sacred way of living.

By lifting the lowly—seeing no one beneath us, and everyone worthy of us.

By feeding stomachs, hearts, minds, and souls that hunger with something good, something that comes from us, from our hands, our heart, our mind, our soul.

By ending all forms of dynastic rule, all forms of dominance, in all the ways dynastic rule takes shape and perpetuates its dominance today.

By dispersing the arrogant, so the arrogant can't magnify their arrogance.

By setting firm limits on the rich—saying no, you can't take any more. In fact, you must give some back.

Do we await a mighty supernatural being to do these godly things for us on earth?

Or are we to achieve these godly tasks on earth?

Or at least strive to achieve them, aspire to achieve them, experience it as our calling to achieve them. Our godly, holy, sacred calling.

Our holy sacred calling, from God.

Are we waiting for God to achieve these tasks on earth?

Or is God waiting for us to achieve these tasks on earth?

Is God waiting for us to learn how to incarnate God's spirit, embody God's spirit, become children of God by magnifying with our words and deeds God's sacred holiness, God's way of living here on earth, the way Jesus did.

Are we waiting for God? Is God waiting for us?

Are we waiting for each other?

Interesting questions to ponder in Advent—the season of waiting.