

Sermon December 11, 2016 A Woman's Wisdom Cara B. Hochhalter

Isaiah 35:1-10 and Luke 1:47-55

The filmmaker, Shannon Kring went to Standing Rock in North Dakota to try to film all sides of the controversy over building a pipeline for oil under the Missouri River. She wanted to record the impact of this pipeline on the sacred burial grounds and livelihood of the Sioux Tribe whose reservation is there.

Instead, she found that the story that wanted to be told was about the strength of the women. She writes, "The women of Standing Rock are willing to risk their lives to stop the pipeline construction that desecrated their ancient burial and prayer sites and threatens their land, water, and very existence. She said these women exemplify what it means to be an *authentically empowered woman in the matrilineal way of being*.

And I wondered how this might describe Mary...an authentically empowered woman in the matrilineal way of being?

Let us be in prayer: God of men and women of all ages, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

There are two important parts of this story about Mary that come just before this pericope that is offered from our lectionary today. First, the angel Gabriel comes to announce to Mary...that she will give birth to a baby boy who is Holy. Our Bible Study group wondered whether she was asked or was she told...was it done in love...or from a place of power? Did Mary have a choice? She wonders about the possibility of it all...but accepts this amazing responsibility...to be the Mother of a Christ-child.

And then the second scene that happens before this reading is the one illustrated on the bulletin. Mary, *authentically empowered woman*, goes by herself to visit her cousin Elizabeth...who also is "with child". They rejoice, these two women...one incredibly young, Mary was maybe just 13 or 14...and one incredibly old. Miracle of miracles, their pregnancies go beyond logic but point to this; with God, all things are possible... and that Jesus...would be someone extraordinary.

And so Mary, like Hannah from Hebrew scriptures before her, breaks into song. Perhaps it was like a musical where you have some action and then all of a sudden a character starts to sing. Mary was so overcome with emotion it seems that she had no choice, but to sing it!

Alice Parker on her wonderful interview on National Public Radio that I hope you all get to hear....says something like it is the vibrations of our own emotions that create

song... that it is through singing that we are most complete as humans and most connected to one another...like the strands of a web.

Think about these most prophetic and revolutionary words being SUNG by a young pregnant girl from Nazareth. Was she pouring out from her soul...trying to connect so deeply with all of us who hear her song through the story? It is called the Magnificat because it begins with these words: *my soul magnifies the Lord!* Imagine that one line...Mary felt like her very being was magnifying, enlarging God through her soul.

Have you ever felt your soul, magnifying God...? Perhaps when you love deeply, when you experience incredible beauty or justice or compassion for someone who needs your care? Do you ever feel your soul, magnifying God?

And from this closeness with God...Mary spills forth a song of praise ...about a future liberation for any who are oppressed, who are poor, who are unjustly treated. It is a song about lifting those who are on the margins and feeding those who are hungry....all this from a girl who Mary lived humbly in Nazareth when it was fiercely controlled by the Roman Empire...there was inequality to the extreme, the economic gap was huge, and many suffered as the wealthy increased their riches at the expense of the poor....it may be sounding familiar.

The Magnificat...has been considered so revolutionary that some churches and political bodies banned it? In the 1980's, the government of Guatemala forbade any public reading of it...as did the government of Argentina in the 1970's! The song pointedly criticizes the three "p's" as Richard Rohr points out: power, prestige and possessions. You can see why governments (and corporations) might cringe as this song that declares the proud, the powerful and the rich to be scattered...brought down...sent away empty."

Why this song? Why this song now when we are just thinking about the birth of a little baby who is Son of God? Some have said it is an *overture*, as the introduction to a larger piece of music...Luke has Mary introduce the entire life and purpose of this Christ-child right here while she is visiting with Elizabeth before she has even had the baby!

It seems to me that this song is an ancient, and a current day, longing for truth-telling....a plea to us all that God yearns for justice among all people including this earth. Charles Campbell writes that the Magnificat is one of the most prophetic of all Biblical scriptures and it invites us all beyond our numb imaginations.

And it has come from Mary, an authentically empowered woman.

I invite you to think about Mary as you hear three things that the filmmaker, Shannon Kring, learned during her time with the Native Women at Standing Rock.

First, she says, **A woman's strength is motivated by a desire to serve the greater good.** She met a 37-year old Indian mother of four who told her: "The land is not a resource. It is an entity that you have a relationship with and you respect, like your grandmother, mother, and aunts."

Second: **A woman's strength is executed with a balance of gentleness and fierceness.** "Women are the protectors of the water and of all life. Men are our defenders," explained one woman. "We are taught to walk with gentleness," added a young Lakota woman who braved mace, tear gas, and rubber bullets on the front line. "We are spiritually grounded people. We believe our ultimate weapon is prayer. We're peaceful, prayerful people...We are at a time when energy resonates with the highest frequency, and that frequency is love. Compassion. Nurturing."

And third, she writes: **A woman's strength is sustained by a sense of responsibility.** The women of Standing Rock believe that humankind's right to existence comes with responsibilities to everything else in creation. Their vow to protect Mother Earth and all her inhabitants is their responsibility to the ancestors, and to the seven generations to come.

Think how the Magnificat, this song poured out through Mary, the mother of Jesus, reflects these same notions...a desire to serve the greater good? Didn't Mary reflect a balance of gentleness and fierceness? *My Soul doth magnify the Lord!* And don't you hear this tremendous sense of responsibility that Mary had as she tries to fulfill the promises handed down through her ancestors, *to Abraham and his descendants forever*, she sings....from ancestors to the seven generations to come!

So, here we are, women and men ...and youth...together. Holding this story, holding our own yearning for truth and justice, holding our own temptations to be angry yet finding strength in this story, this song, this example of peace-making and prayer-keeping...this promise of the mercy of God in and through us all.

Maybe we can raise our voices in song...more often!

I will close with a quote from Anne Lamont that I think Alice will appreciate. The writer, Anne Lamont says: "...music is about as physical as it gets: your essential rhythm is your heartbeat: your essential sound, the breath. We're walking temples of noise, and when you add tender hearts to this mix, it somehow lets us meet in places we couldn't get to any other way."

Sing...I'm gonna sing so God can use me, Anywhere Lord, Any time...I'm gonna sing so God can use me, Anywhere Lord, anytime.

Amen.