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Luke 1:26-55

## MAGNIFICATION

Around the age of 40, I discovered that I suddenly needed reading glasses. I could no longer read the listings in the phone book or the ingredient labels of food products. So I finally acquiesced to the inevitability of aging and bought a pair of reading glasses. And my reading glasses did what all reading glasses do: they magnified the print so I could see what was in front of me.

Sometimes we do not want to see what is in front of us. Sometimes what we see is too overwhelming. There have been times this year when the news from around our world has been so upsetting, we've needed a break from the endless magnification of bad news that comes to us from the news reports as well as from the realities of our lives. So in place of the bad news, many of us over this year have made a concerted effort to shift our metaphorical magnifying glass to focus instead on that which is good and uplifting.

In the song Mary sings in our scripture passage today, this young and pregnant girl is holding up a magnifying glass to focus our sights on something good—on God and the good things God is doing. We call her song “the Magnificat” which is Latin for “magnify” because of how Mary begins her song, stating: My soul magnifies the Lord. Right from the beginning, Mary seeks to magnify, to enlarge, our understanding of God's goodness.

But here's the difference. Instead of trying to magnify God's goodness in *place* of seeing all that is ugly and broken and painful in this world, instead of magnifying God's goodness as a way to shift our focus away from the bad news of this world, Mary magnifies the goodness of

what God is doing *to* the bad things in this world. She sings about the complete reversal of the unjust circumstances in the world: how God is bringing down the powerful and is lifting up the poor and the lowly, how the hungry are being filled with good things in both body and soul, and those who have overindulged are sent away empty. The Christian Church has been mistaken in its depiction of Mary as a meek little girl, for this song is the cry of a revolutionary. Three separate governments in human history found Mary's song so revolutionary that they actually banned it from being recited in public out of fear of what it could incite among their citizens. Mary's revolutionary song magnifies the goodness of what God is doing *to* the bad, the wrong, and the unjust things in this world.

We can walk around our lives using different kinds of magnifying glasses. We can easily get caught up with the magnification of the bad in this world and the wrongs we have experienced. And when we do this, we become vulnerable to despair and depression, to bitterness and hostility. Some people will choose to deal with the overwhelming bad news of the world by magnifying only what is good and pleasant and nice. That is all they will allow themselves to focus on. But this strategy easily leads to a superficial and detached way of being in this world and with the hurting people of this world.

But Mary hands us a special magnifying glass—one that sees the bad for what it is and then enlarges our understanding of the good that God is doing *to* the bad. God is confronting the wrongs and injustice, God is healing the wounded places, God is restoring the damaged spirits, God is transforming the human heart. With the help of people like Mary, the season of Advent magnifies God's justice, God's compassion, God's love upon this very damaged world in order that we might see it and have hope. Because sometimes, in fact quite often, God's transforming goodness comes in forms we don't always recognize-- like the birth of a baby born to an

impoverished couple in a small backwater town. This baby would grow up to magnify a better way for us to live—God’s way—a way defined by justice for all people, radical forgiveness, unconditional love, compassion for the weak, service to others, and the abundant generosity of our hearts and our hands. Advent magnifies the goodness of God so that we can see it and so that we can then join in this holy work of confronting, healing, restoring, and transforming.

Today, on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent, when Covid-19 still rages around our globe, as people are lying sick in hospitals, as people are unemployed and business teeter on the brink of failing, as the gash of racism still lies wide open on the soul of our nation, as members of both political parties dig down further in their separate bunkers, today, this day, we magnify the goodness of our God who has not abandoned us to the painful realities of this world. We magnify a God who comes to transform us and our world.

We magnify God this Christmas because Christmas is when God magnifies *us*. Christmas is when God magnifies humanity. Despite our brokenness, despite our propensity to cause harm, despite our selfish orientations, despite our own darkness and self-destructive behaviors, God loves us and believes in the possibility of our transformation. With the birth of Jesus, God demonstrates that human beings are worthy of God’s love, grace, and healing efforts. God cherishes us humans and believes that we each are more than the worst things we have done.

We hear Mary sing about God taking on the “bad” forces at work in societies. But what we know is that some of those “bad” forces are at work *within* us, making us less than who God knows we can be. And so in love God comes to us as Emmanuel to confront our darkness and to deliver us from the forces that oppress us—the powerful forces outside of us that cause harm, and the powerful forces within us that cause harm.

Through her song, Mary magnifies the radical goodness of God so we can see what is in front of us: a God who demands justice for the weak, who cares for the vulnerable, who overthrows the many kinds of oppressive powers that hold us all captive, and who offers us all a better way to live. Like Mary, once we see what is in front of us, we can join her in singing: “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God’s name.”