**“Wild Inside”** Rev. Dr. Julia A. Carlson
Fourth Sunday of Advent The House of Hope Presbyterian Church
Luke 1:39-55 Saint Paul, Minnesota
December 22, 2024

I recently found out that Irish priest, scholar and writer, John O’Donohue wrote a sonnet for each of the stations of the cross.

The first is titled

The Annunciation

Cast from afar before the storms were born

And rain had rinsed the darkness for colour,

The words have waited for the hunger in her

To become the silence where they could form.

The day’s last light frames her by the window,

A young woman with distance in her gaze.

She could never imagine the surprise

That is hovering over her life now.

The sentence awakens like a raven, fluttering and dark,

Opening her heart to nest the voice

That first whispered the earth,

From dream into wind, stone, sky and ocean,

She offers to mother the shadow’s child,

Her untouched life becoming wild inside.

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of Love and step into the mystery of Jesus Christ. However well we might come to know the man in our lifetime, his arrival and his nature, that is being born of Mary (not Joseph) and being fully human and fully divine are, right now, beyond our understanding.

We believe in a mysterious, Divine Presence that we learn about through the biblical text and, I want to say at the outset, we honor this text but in the strictest terms, we do not worship the Bible. We believe in and worship the Triune God. We believe in Adonai, in Elohim, the Creator God; we believe in Jesus Christ, “born of the virgin Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate; we believe in the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit who is the sacred umbilical cord connecting us with the one, true God. And, God is working to birth a kin-dom on earth and we are the midwives of that work. It may sound like gender specific language but not a gender specific role. Mary’s words today make clear she knew that her son was coming to turn everything on its ear.

Biblical scholar Elizabeth Johnson says, “The Magnificat is a revolutionary song of salvation whose political, economic, and social dimensions cannot be blunted. People in need in every society hear a blessing in this canticle. The battered woman, the single parent without resources, those without food on the table or without even a table, the homeless family, the young abandoned to their own devices, the old who are discarded: all are encompassed in the hope Mary proclaims” (Sister Elizabeth Johnson, 2012).

While some have always or still read the *Magnificat* as praise for the piety of Mary, it is, in the words of one commentator, a Manifesto. “The Magnificat was banned being sung or read in India under British rule. In the 1980’s, it was banned in Guatemala. In addition, after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo—whose children all disappeared during the Dirty War (1976-1983)—placed the Magnificat’s words on posters throughout the capital plaza, the military junta of Argentina outlawed any public display of Mary’s song” ([The Subversive Magnificat: What Mary Expected The Messiah To Be Like](https://enemylove.com/subversive-magnificat-mary-expected-messiah-to-be-like/)).

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer . . . spoke these words in a sermon during Advent in 1933: “The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung.”

In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? And he answers, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39). This is known as Jesus’ Great Commandment. Today we have, as one priest suggests, Mary’s “Magna Carta, “a Great Charter” of any and all authentic faith experience.” We are then, invited, not to catalog this reading, but to take it in, let it gestate, and then give it birth.

If we worship a book, we can leave this kind of wild, revolutionary, and passionate action to the characters in the book. We might also consider the congregation to be a kind of guard rail–that we believe in the call with the hope that someone else will pick it up or, God forbid, you think this is what the clergy are here for. We all leave seminary to share this wildness (and find committees). Meanwhile you may be missing the heart of the journey of the Christian faith. Perhaps these are reasons we add lights and sparkle, and glitz to Christmas. Ready as we have become for the baby Jesus, we put off meeting Jesus, the man, the teacher, the Rabbi until the “great by and by.” Over the years, a few of you have expressed greater need to put off meeting “the God of the Old Testament.” So then consider the courage as well as the faith Mary brings as she know them both so intimately.

This is O’Donohue’s second poem,

The Visitation:

In the morning it takes the mind a while

To find the world again,

lost after dream

Has taken the heart to the underworld

To play with the shades of lives not chosen.

She awakens a stranger in her own life,

Her breath loud in the room full of listening.

Taken without touch, her flesh feels the grief

Of belonging to what cannot be seen.

Soon she can no longer bear to be alone.

At dusk she takes the road to the hills.

An anxious moon doubles her among the stone.

A door opens, the older one’s eyes fill.

Two women locked in a story of birth Each mirrors the secret the other heard.

Benedictine consociate Kaitlyn Kruger wrote this about the *Magnificat*, “This is a threshold moment [for Mary] and, “moments of threshold, of vulnerability and openness to new understanding, are part of the essence of the Gospel, and part of the conversion of life into which . . . spirituality calls us” (The Magnificat: A Reflection Kaitlyn Kruger). We are called to listen for, to grapple with and to mirror for each other the wisdom God shares with us. And it is critical for us now because each day it looks more and more like the world is at a threshold moment.

Transformation or collapse? War or peace? A worldwide Billionaire class that takes all or Earth Care and Enough? However, Jesus taught paradox and non-duality–he taught a third way: resistance, creativity, wildness, passion, the Holy. He taught us how to recognize the limits of personal power and where we do have agency. Most importantly he instructed us on the value and substance of knowing where we are centered.

The Nativity

No man reaches where the moon touches a women.

Even the moon leaves her when she opens, deeper into the ripple in her womb

that encircles dark, to become flesh and bone.

Someone is coming ashore inside her:

A face deciphers itself from water

And she curves around the gathering wave,

Opening to offer the life it craves.

In a corner stall of pilgrim strangers

She falls and heaves, holding a tide of tears.

A red wire of pain feeds through every vein,

 until night unweaves and the child reaches dawn.

Outside each other now, she sees him first

Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son, safe on earth.

Safe on earth–isn’t that what it’s all about? That all of the daughters and sons be safe on earth, including the daughters who inwardly know they are sons and declared sons who know they are really daughters. That the man attracted to another man is safe and that all women are safe regardless of marital state or sexual preference. In Mary’s song, the children are safe in schools and CEO’s are safe as well but hopefully wiser and compassionate. That people of all races and creeds are safe, the Indigenous, the African and African American, the Syrian, Ukrainian, and Korean, every single one of us, safe on earth. Mary speaks of it in the past tense and since we know two millennia have passed since she sang this song, we must conclude that the God who inspired this it must be living an eternal frustration with our fear, and our greed, and our willful and warring ways.

Priest and writer Ron Rolheiser wrote, “Looking at our world, we see that the gap between rich and poor is widening, hundreds of millions of people go to bed hungry every night, corruption and crime are everywhere, and the powerful seemingly can simply take whatever they want without repercussions. We have … millions of refugees … around the world, and women and children are still victims of violence of all kinds everywhere. . . . So where do we see that God has hast cast down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty?”

In answer to his own question, he wrote, “We see it in the resurrection of Jesus and the vision of hope given us in that reality.” Rolheiser continued, “What Mary affirms in the *Magnificat* is a deep truth we can only grasp in faith and hope, namely, that even though at present injustice, corruption, and exploitation of the poor, seem to reign, there will be a last day when that oppressive stone will roll back from the tomb and the powerful will topple. The *Magnificat* is the ultimate prayer of hope–and the ultimate prayer for the poor. . . . as I grow older, . . . I now make sure no day goes by where pressure, tiredness, distraction, or laziness keep me from praying at least two prayers with focus and attention, the Lord’s Prayer and the *Magnificat*.”

It is too easy to keep Mary as a beloved but meek and mild character in a favorite book; it is then also possible to admire the style and content of her song while sidelining it along with Elizabeth in favor of shepherds and kings. But Mary states here, “my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,” which means she feels the salvation of The Christ at his conception. We should reevaluate our own sureness in believing we already understand the vast ability of God to save and redeem.

And beware the mentality of the Caesars, Khans, Emperors, Kings, and Dictators which is small-minded, closed-hearted, and self-serving. They don’t seek saviors but act the part. Hearing God’s truth should send shivers down their spines just as it should send shivers down ours.

As Meister Eckhart wrote, “We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and culture?” Mary’s story is our story and Mary’s song is our song and our hearts are nesting places for God. May it be so. Amen.