Songs of Praise

August 13, 2006 (Feast of Mary, Mother of Jesus [transferred])

Isaiah 61:10-11 Luke 1:46-5 Psalm 34

Did you notice that all of today's readings are songs of praise? "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult my God."[i] "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth."[ii] "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour."[iii]

This is praise that you feel in your gut, the very center of your being. It's a physical sensation that you can't deny, and you can't keep it to yourself. It can happen spontaneously, anytime; in communal worship or alone. And it can happen all the time.

This is praise that is a state of being that encompasses our whole selves. It wells up from inside us, sometimes unbidden and inconvenient and not understood, and yet "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour."[iv]

Why this song of praise? God has, to quote Mary's song, "looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."[v] "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation and covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with jewels."[vi] "I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears."[vii] The Mighty One has done great things for me."[viii]

When I stop to look, when I step outside the smallness of my usual self-focused perspective, when I come out of my intellect and into awareness of my whole, physical and spiritual being, I cannot deny that God has richly blessed me. Holy is God's name.

God continues to be faithful to us. "For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations."[ix] "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them."[x] "God's mercy is on those who fear God from generation to generation."[xi]

God is loyal to us. Even when we don't recognize God's invitation in our lives God lingers—lovingly—protecting us, feeding us, urging us to become more than we thought possible.

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God's name together."[xii]

In the space created by Mary's faith—and not simply her womb—the Word became flesh. Her song—predicated on her willingness to trust God in the uncertainty of what would come next for her—begins Messianic time, Kingdom of God time. Her faith births a new kind of relationship with God: A relationship of co-creator, wherein we recognize God's loving call to us to join in the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Mary sings that God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts, brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. Fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty-handed. This is the promised time of justice and plenty. A time without shortage or surplus.

Mary sings her song of hope. She, a young woman pregnant with a fatherless child, dares to articulate a vision of society where all are treated with dignity; a world

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without domination and submission. She gives words to these seemingly impossible hopes welling out of her being. She praises God with whom all things are possible. She begins to comprehend the holy invitation, her part in creating the kingdom of God, with her faith as well as her womb. God, enfleshed.

I wonder what *our* song of praise will be? We too are co-creators in the vision of Kingdom time. God entices us into relationship, desires our partnership. This relationship begins with allowing ourselves to be in our bodies, to feel and express the praise of God that wells up in us. Sometimes it's praise, and sometimes it's a sense of smallness before God, that kind of awe the psalmist calls 'fear of God.' Sometimes it comes out as words we didn't know we had in us, or as tears, or singing, or dancing with that sense of God in us, God's power with us, God within us.

We turn to that vision of the kingdom as a place of justice and plenty for all. A place where there are not a billion people slowly dying of extreme poverty or hunger. Where every child learns to read and write, and do basic math. Where women and men are considered equals in power and deserving respect.

This is a world where, in the course of this sermon, 20,000 children didn't just die of preventable diseases and six women didn't just die of complications of pregnancy.

In the kingdom, medications and prevention for HIV, malaria, tuberculosis and a host of other diseases are available to all who need them. People work in cooperation, not competition, with the earth and her resources, and the nations of the world work together on aid, trade, and debt relief.

This is one amazing vision of the kingdom. It happens to be articulated as the Millennium Development Goals which were adopted by the Episcopal Church at General Convention in June as our top priority for mission for the next three years. These are huge goals. They are a song of hope for our time in history. A song of justice and plenty for all.

As we are birthed in our baptism and fed at this table, we are constantly invited by our loving, protecting, nurturing God to participate in creating the Kingdom.

Together, we can draw on the power of the Holy welling up within us to sing out our praise, to be open to the loving leading of God wherever it takes us and to claim our partnership in co-creating the Kingdom here and now.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good."[xiii]
Holy is her name

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[i] Isaiah 61:10. All scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
[ii] Psalm 34:1
[iii] Luke 1:46-47
[iv] Luke 1:46-47
[v] Luke 1:48
[vi] Isaiah 61:10
[vii] Psalm 34:4
[viii] Luke 1:49
[ix] Isaiah 61:11
[x] Psalm 34:7
[xi] Luke 1:50
[xii] Psalm 34:3
[xiii] Psalm 34:8

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