

Sunday 19 December 2021

Sermon on the Magnificat

By the Rev, Jackie Bullen

Have you ever watched a small child exploring the world around them? They crouch and they lie on their tummy on the floor and they crawl around and they get well frankly quite dirty at times.

Standing up and looking just isn't enough for them. They have to get down and look and more than that they touch and they smell and they prod and they poke things until they can discover what it is they are looking at.

I remember my Mother telling me: 'You look with your eyes not your hands and she was, of course, right.'

Yes, in the first instance we do look with our eyes, but looking is not the same as truly discovering and learning all we could about something.

Maybe at your Secondary school you were allowed to do even more looking and touching and discovering with the use of a magnifying glass under laboratory conditions.

A whole new level of understanding becomes available in the science lab. We can really start to see what is happening before our eyes and the world takes on a whole new dimension.

I, along with many other students, who had also probably been told that you 'look with your eyes' were hooked by that experience and our love of science lessons and trying to discover more of the world around us was ignited.

Our Science teacher was pleased, No, more than pleased, she was excited by our new found interest in her subject, and I imagine any subject is easier to teach when you have eager pupils who want to learn. People who are fired up with a thirst for knowledge and even more than that people who want to discover how to put that knowledge to good use in the world.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent. As we try to discover once more the meaning of this season, we think especially about Mary. Mary the Mother of Jesus. Mary, whose song, known as the Magnificat includes these words: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord".

In the Book of Common Prayer those words are translated as “My soul doth magnify the Lord”. Interesting phrase.

And then a little later, “For he that is mighty hath magnified me.” I magnify the Lord, but the Lord also magnifies me. It’s a double magnification and it maybe sounds a little “through the looking-glass.” But that’s where we are in Advent.

Advent prepares us for Christmas, which takes us through the looking glass. There, On the other side, everything looks familiar, but everything is also utterly and profoundly different. Because God has been born, Incarnate, one of us, and that changes our perspective, it changes everything.

In Advent we are still in that time of looking for Christ to come. Looking and waiting and preparing a place for him.

For some, that will be preparing a physical space with a group of wooden or knitted or pottery figures who are sitting or standing waiting for the Christ child to come and fill the empty space in the middle.

But for some it is also about creating a space in our hearts and minds so that God might be born afresh in us. Born in us to make our souls, our bodies, our very being ready and available to magnify the greatness of God.

We delight in singing about the wonderful works of God at this time of year. And we find it easy and comforting to sing about what God brings about in the world. We sing about God bringing joy and peace.

But, Mary’s song invites us to consider not only what can happen but how it might happen.

The Magnificat can be read as an invitation to sing along with Mary about our part in God’s plan for his world. This is what Jesus’ being born as a baby tells us. It’s what Mary is telling us. That God goes about bringing peace, and joy, and love, and hope to the world through us. By magnifying God’s grace and spirit through us.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,” can mean that through me, through you, through us, others may see the Lord more clearly.

By the way that we choose to live our lives and practice our faith in the world, people might catch a sustained glimpse of that peaceful kingdom. We are able to experience and know and share God’s peace.

Through each of us, through our words and our actions, through all that we do, we magnify God’s being with our own bodies. We magnify God’s action with our own practices. We magnify God’s word with our words in the world. God is the one who

acts. And we magnify that action by providing the hands and feet and hearts and minds. We can collaborate with God in the divine actions of lifting up of the lowly, feeding the hungry.

A good question to meditate on in the remaining time before Christmas might be: 'How do I magnify the Lord?' I agree, that is a big question.

It's easy to think that it's too big for any one of us to handle. But another important lesson the Magnificat teaches is that it teaches us that we are enough for God to work with and through. Whoever you are, whatever you have or haven't done, you are enough.

The song of Mary reminds us that all of the scripture points to the little, the lowly, the one who says "who me?"

After all, Bethlehem is nothing special. Elizabeth was also thought to be barren, and endured disgrace because of it. And Mary is no one. An under-age woman from a nowhere town, Nazareth, engaged to someone we're told is from the house of David, but that doesn't really make Joseph all that special; a lot of people were distantly related to David.

All throughout scripture, whenever God wants to do something it's the little, the ordinary, the unexceptional, that He uses. And God himself comes as one of the most vulnerable creatures on the planet, a human child. Veiled in human flesh, this fragile and easily broken substance.

Mary reminds us that we are how God lives and moves and brings about His will in the world. It is not through the magic or sparkle that the TV adverts seem to promise, but through human beings.

Through Mary, and her child Jesus, and with the help of the Holy Spirit through apostles, prophets and martyrs and even through us, God transforms the hope we share into the reality of His realm of justice and peace.

And, just like Mary, we are enough. Each of us is enough to magnify God.

Imagine what would happen if we were truly ready to greet him.

If we let God magnify the good work that He has begun and is already doing in each of us.

And if we joined together with others to magnify that work? Imagine the world that could be born from that.

As we prepare to welcome Christ once more into our hearts and our homes, may our souls magnify more and more the glory of God and our hearts be moved by the excitement of learning more of him and of his promise.

Amen.