

Luke 1:46-55
“Home for All”
The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 19, 2021

The Reading:

⁴⁶ *And Mary said,*

⁴⁷ *“My soul magnifies the Lord,*

⁴⁸ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

⁴⁹ *for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁵⁰ *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*

and holy is God’s name.

⁵¹ *The Holy One’s mercy is for those who fear him*

from generation to generation.

⁵² *God has shown strength with his arm;*

scattering the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵³ *The Lord has brought down the powerful from their thrones,*

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵⁴ *God has filled the hungry with good things,*

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁵ *The Almighty has helped his servant Israel,*

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise God made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

I like musicals. One of my favorites is *Mame* with Rosalind Russell in the lead. It’s become a kind of Christmas movie, I guess, because of one of its songs: “We Need a Little Christmas.”

Mame’s story begins with disruption. The *disruption* is the arrival of her young nephew, Patrick. After his father – her brother – dies, *Mame* becomes Patrick’s guardian. This ends her carefree, flamboyant, single life as she knew it. Even so, she comes to love Patrick dearly, and this changes her. The love between them and the members of her eclectic household makes a *home* – an incredibly resilient home – one that she never could have imagined in her former existence and for which she is profoundly grateful.

In our scripture reading, Mary praises God for the disruption of love that creates “home.”

Mary is thanking God for turning her life upside-down! First of all, she is incredibly surprised that the Mighty One has chosen her for this sacred pregnancy. Why her? No one had taken notice of her in the society of which she was a part. Plus, it will probably mean the end of her good reputation and could be a risk for her survival. This news will also make a mess of her and Joseph’s plans, that is, *if* he even stays with her!

Indeed, Mary has no inkling of *how* this little child is going to fulfill God's promise and mission, or just how *much* he will disrupt *her* life and the ways of the world!

Yet it is the disruption of this divine love that will make a "home" and a family for Mary. Granted, their home will not have a Hallmark décor around the fireplace, or hot cocoa. Everything is not going to be in order under the tree, and none of her plans are going to unfold as planned. Instead, it is going to be the best ever, topsy-turvy, true Christmas, because Mary is finally "home" in God's disruptive love!

Moreover, Mary is praising God that this home is for *all*.

Yes, some people define "home" and God's favor very narrowly – "us four, no more." Yet Mary knows that God's blessing is *not* just for her, Joseph, and Jesus. This birth is also for her people, Israel – God's promises to her ancestors – the Messiah is for them too. Furthermore, God's mission is for the whole inhabited world – "oikoumene" is the Greek word. As she sings, "home" for Mary is HUGE! She is sharing *God's* salvation vision! In her Magnificat, Mary is thanking God for turning the world upside down so that *everyone* can be home for Christmas.

When the lowly are left low, you see, and only a few are "on top," your souls and mine are diminished – deprived. If the hungry don't have what they need, neither do we; we're as empty as the rich that turn away from God's vision.

We can legitimately infer from Mary's song of praise that home the way that *God conceives it* includes making adjustments in the way things are currently. Faith and financial upheavals are necessary; this is why the Magnificat refers to a redistribution of wealth. This disruption will originate from love and from people whose souls have been enlarged by love – *magnified* – not those from which love has been strangled.

The home that God designs also requires major power disruptions; this is why the Magnificat describes the collapse of hierarchies. Unjust structures of worth are weak and when people of so-called 'lesser pedigree' are not supported, due to racism, for example, this situation must be remedied. So God *reconstructs*, using the powerful materials and bonds of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which in turn make this home strong and one of *servicing* others.

Isaiah and Jesus describe Home as God creates it with these words:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."¹

The Messiah's disruptive mission of love continues today. You and I see it in Christmas toy drives, food distribution, to Tent Cities that spur just housing efforts. I remember thinking that Occupy Boston was like a modern Magnificat. You may not agree with me, but as I listened to their points, I hoped that it might spur new economic models for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

¹Luke 4:16-20

Christ's mission is also being advanced through the loving care of researchers, physicians, and nurses in public health during COVID, hopefully leading to the creation of *global* systems of prevention and healing.

This week I read on Worldrelief.org about Rodney, a man who loves God and loves people, but used to lump immigrants under the label "criminals," that is, until he heard about the Connect English Language Center through his son. Rodney felt led to learn more, then to volunteer, and eventually to meet the real people who leave one home for another. During this process, Rodney also prayed: "God make me open," which led him to help immigrants learn to drive and get their permits. He's friends with all kinds of people from Columbia, Venezuela, Guinea, and the Congo, so much so that Rodney now thinks of himself as a missionary in the *U.S.* His soul has been expanded through this process and, like Mary, he now 'sings:' "Take everything that I am, and use me for your glory."

You see, the disruption of God's love creates Home for all, and by magnifying God's name with Mary, *we* too can offer *ourselves* as home for the re-birth of Christ! *This* is just the kind of "little Christmas" that we need right this very minute!