

**3 Advent
December 15, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

Throughout this Advent season we have been hearing about the yearnings of God's people. In the readings from the prophet Isaiah, from the Psalms, from the letters of Paul, and from our Gospel readings from Matthew. And, on this Third Sunday of Advent, we recited the Song of Mary ... the Magnificat.

The Song of Mary is always an option on the Third Sunday of Advent. It is from Luke's gospel. It tells the story of Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth ... Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. When Elizabeth saw Mary the baby jumped in Elizabeth's womb. When Elizabeth shared this with the Mary, she ... according to the author of Luke's gospel ... started singing a protest song ... "the proud are going to wallow in their own conceit," she says ... "the rich will have nothing and the poor will have all they need" ... "those who think they have power will be brought down, and those at the bottom will rise up."

To me, this sounds a lot like Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and others on the political left. Yet, these are the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary while talking about the one who will be called the Messiah ... it is Mary singing about God's yearning for this world.

What Mary sang about were the yearnings of the people of God, and these are also the yearnings of God for God's people: justice and peace, equity and safety, healing and compassion. There is a Hebrew term for this ... Tikkun olam ... repair the world.

So, what is the greatest yearning of your soul? What is the life that you would like to see more than anything in the world?

If your answer is to win the lottery, you are in the wrong place. I'm talking about that which is closest to your heart and soul ... that which will bring true wholeness. I'm talking about that which is of ultimate importance in your life, in your relationship with those that are closest to you, in your place in the community around you, and that which is of ultimate importance to you in this world. What is it that you yearn for in your life? What is it that you want for those who are closest to you: your significant other, your children, your parents, your closest and most intimate friends? What is it

that you want for this community of St. Cyprian's ... of St. Augustine ... for our nation?
And, what do you long for in this world in which we all live?

These are questions that people have been living with since the beginning of time. These are the questions that have shaped our world. These are the questions that have formed our faith. It is in seeking the answers to these questions that we find the divine presence of God in our lives.

Now, I've tried to read the Bible regularly and carefully for over forty years, but I must say that I was struck when I read the Scriptures for this week. The passages from Isaiah, the Song of Mary, and Matthew's gospel all emphasize the people toward whom God is biased. These Scriptures describe at least eighteen sorts of people in pain who might be forgotten by the world but who are nevertheless remembered by God: the blind, the lame, the diseased, the deaf, the dead, the poor, those who have no voice, the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners, the bowed down, foreigners and strangers, orphans, widows, the humble, and also, those with feeble hands, weak knees, and fearful hearts.

Throughout biblical history the God of Israel has called people to righteousness, and the people have called to their God for peace instead of war, justice instead of tyranny, to feed the hungry and bring healing to the afflicted ... all pointing towards wholeness in individual and community life.

Is this not what all of us want in our lives, regardless of the time or generation? Is not this the longing of peoples in all cultures around the world? We want the world to be whole. We yearn for our communities to be whole. We long for our relationships to be whole. And we certainly have the desire that we, ourselves, might be whole.

The world as we know it today is not whole. It is divided by a fear of the stranger ... the refugee ... the immigrant. It is divided into the "haves" and the "have-nots." It is divided by who to include and who to exclude ... who is "in," and who is "out." A consequence of that division is poverty beyond our imaginings, hunger to the point of famine and starvation, and disease of epidemic proportions. A divided world is a world at war over who will have the power to control the resources ... the very resources to end poverty, hunger and disease. If we really believe that the god we worship is the God of **ALL** creation then we must recognize that we are merely stewards of this bounty that is to be shared in justice with **ALL** of God's creatures. If we are truly one global family, then every war we fight is a civil war.

God's desire for us is wholeness. Our yearning, as people of faith, is for God's desire to be fulfilled.

In last week's Gospel reading from Matthew we heard John the Baptist describing this yearning for a messiah. John was baptizing with water, but the one to follow John, the

one who would fulfill this messianic yearning, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He would cut down the tree that did not produce good fruit, and he would separate the wheat from the chaff.

In this week's Gospel reading we again hear about John the Baptist, only now he has been arrested. While in prison he heard of the things Jesus was doing ... this Jesus that John had baptized. He sent word to Jesus and asked if, indeed, Jesus was the messiah for whom they were waiting. Jesus answered not with a report of judgment such as John had predicted, but with a report of bringing wholeness to those most in need.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

The answer Jesus gave sounds a lot like the yearnings written by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus went on to say that some might be offended by this answer. One has to wonder why someone might be offended. But we need only look around us in this political climate and notice those who are offended by such sentiments. Yet, these are certainly not the actions of the messiah that John the Baptist had described. Remember, John had predicted judgment, but instead of judgment Jesus spoke of compassion and healing. Instead of separating the wheat from the chaff, Jesus was pointing to healing and wholeness. Instead of cutting down the tree that didn't provide fruit, Jesus was nurturing the poor, and the blind, and the lame, and the deaf back into life.

What do we want most in our lives? What do we want most for the people we love, and for our community, for our nation, and for the world? It is these desires that are our yearnings. What we long for most of all is wholeness in ourselves, in our families, and in the world.

God sent his son Jesus to fulfill those yearnings of our ancient spiritual ancestors. But God sent a messiah humbly born to a homeless family in an outbuilding. Instead of power from the top down, Jesus embraced healing and transformation of life from the bottom up. He surprised even John the Baptist ... and he is coming again to surprise us.

In just a week-and-a-half, we will celebrate the birth of God's son. We will celebrate the incarnation of the divine spirit of God manifested in the life of humanity. We will celebrate the coming of the messiah to fulfill the yearnings of God's people ... the yearnings of God's people 2,000 years ago, and the yearnings of God's people today. It would be wonderful if God would send a savior that would upright the world with judgment and power. But the story tells us something different.

Yes, the world will be turned upside down, but from the inside out and from the bottom up, not the other way around. When we find wholeness in our lives we contribute to God's wholeness. What is celebrated on Christmas is the power of God coming alive in this world, and it can come alive in you and me. When we are transformed, when we become whole, then our lives will be changed, and so will the lives of those around us.

John asked Jesus if he was the messiah for whom they yearned, and in words that echo the prophet Isaiah, Jesus answered:

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

We have to ask the questions: Where are we blind in our lives? From what disease of spirit do we need to be cleansed? To what cries in the world around us are we deaf? How are we poor in our own lives? What would new life look like for us? When we take our yearning for wholeness and look on the inside then we can be prepared for the divine life of God to come alive within us. That will bring us the wholeness for which we have been longing. Then we will know the reality of the incarnation. Then we will know the power of Christmas.

In just a week-and-a-half, we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the Feast of the Incarnation, the divine presence of God coming alive in the life of humanity. As we approach this holy day remember to ask yourself the question, "What is it that you want most in your life? What is your greatest yearning? Of what do you need to be healed? When we are serious about our own wholeness, wholeness for those closest to us, and wholeness for the world around us, we can be prepared for the divine life of God to come alive. Then we will know the reality of the incarnation. Then we will know the true power of Christmas. It will not come in judgment. It will not come as a power to challenge power. Rather it will come in surprising ways. It will come in humility. It will come by bringing healing to our wounds. It will come with the remembering of the birth of a baby, 2,000 years ago, in a stable far, far away.

Amen.