

Reflection for Sunday, December 23, 2018 - "The Power of Song"

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

In Mary's great song, memory, hope and courage intertwine. She sings of what God has already done, even as she eagerly awaits what God will do through Jesus. And, it seems, singing gives her the courage to participate in God's work of turning the world around.

Singing is such a powerful act of hope and resilience. Singing counters intimidation and evokes courage. We see this throughout history: in the early church, the Civil Rights Movement, the sing-ing that helped bring down the Berlin Wall, to name just a few. I also see this every time Brooke, Jutta Anderson and I go to lead worship at the Wellington Place nursing home.

There's a beautiful resident there who always tells us how blessed she is by the chance to hear Brooke's music and join in song. This dear woman has known deep suffering; she has been a widow for almost forty years. She endures extreme pain each day. Her daughters live far away and are suffering with severe pain themselves.

Yet when she joins in song with us, she gets to remember and proclaim God's faithfulness. Her hope is renewed. She is given the courage to persevere in the face of sorrow and struggle, to defy the suffering that would keep her down. Memory, hope and courage intertwine. She is lifted up. Her face beams with radiance and joy.

This dear woman is Mary as she proclaims God's faithfulness and sings her hope. She is also Elizabeth for she offers blessing, welcome and encouragement to Brooke, Jutta and me as we bear Christ in the worship service.

Like this radiant woman, all of us are given hope as we raise our voices in song. We join with the church throughout time, with Mother Mary, Martin Luther King, Jr., and this saint at Wellington Place; and together we defy the power of suffering and evil to keep us down. We stand against everything that would intimidate us and overpower us to say, "You do not have the last word." God is faithful. God keeps promises. God is turning the world around. We sing and we are lifted up. We find the courage to join God's work.

Yet sometimes we don't even have the strength or courage to enter the song. Sometimes the song within us cannot be unleashed until another person welcomes and blesses us, the way Elizabeth did for Mary. Sometimes we need to do that for others.

This is what we do together as the body of Christ when we gather for worship each week. We re-ceive welcome and blessing, and our very presence offers welcome and blessing to others.

Together we find the courage to enter the song.

Together our songs are unleashed.

We need one another.

We need to join our voices together in order to remember God's faithfulness, nurture our hope and find the courage we need.

So, let us sing.