

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of December 20, 2009

Expect the Unexpected: God's Great Reversal (Luke 1:39-45)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is according to St. Luke. Our Lord says to us:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in the humble state of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And to generation after generation he has shown the thought of their hearts; he has sent away empty those of humble estate; he has helped the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he said to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

This is the Word of God.

Dear friends in Christ, when a person begins a new project of some kind there is usually some element of uncertainty, perhaps a certain amount of risk. When learning to drive, for example, I remember being told to expect the unexpected, to try to anticipate what the other cars in front of me might do. This sort of approach helped anticipate potential problems so they could be more easily dealt with.

With regard to the Lord our God, this is never true or unexpected. God has a way of reversing and turning on their head. God tells us in the book of Isaiah, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55).

A popular saying among Christians over the last few years is, "What would Jesus do?" It acts as a reminder of our Lord's moral teachings. The problem is, many times we don't know what Jesus might do in a specific circumstance.

In the Bible Jesus surprised His disciples over and over again. He said things like, "Blessed are the poor," "The meek shall inherit the earth," "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." He denounced the religious leaders who were largely respected in the community. Jesus was a master at doing the unexpected. And the most unexpected of His works as the Messiah was, of course, that He suffered and died for the world's sins and rose again on the third day.

In the account of Luke today we see Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both Elizabeth and Mary are with child. John is approximately six months old in the womb and Jesus is newly conceived. In fact, the Son of God Almighty is about the size of a pencil at this stage in Mary's womb; quite ironic and unexpected.

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Zachariah had a beautiful prophecy about John. "You of the Most High and you will go before the Lord to know the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1).

Now what eventually happened to John? He gets his head chopped off; it doesn't get through John and through all His people together for the good of those who love Him.

In Mary's prophetic song, which the church calls the Magnificat, she says, "God has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."

Mary isn't kidding when she says He casts down the mighty from their thrones. Because this is God's world. It is not Satan's world. God is going to do this through His Child. He will reverse the injustice and death. One day He is actually visibly going to do this through His Child. He will reverse the problem is for now He is going to make these reverses unexpected ways. And the greatest unexpected way is resurrection.

During this upcoming Christmas season there are so many things that can easily become obscured by the traditions of the world, the hustle and bustle of gift shopping, baking, etc. In fact, sadly and ironically for many people in our culture Jesus is virtually irrelevant to their celebrating Christmas. But the birth of Christ is of monumental importance. It is the basis for our salvation. To celebrate His birth is essentially a life we have in Him.

For without the Incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus, He would not have become the atoning sacrifice for our sins and we would be lost. His Incarnation, His cross, and His resurrection are the reason we have hope for His return. We celebrate these events as our very salvation.

For when we look back at His birth, with hope. Jesus Christ has reversed your fortunes. He has changed the eternal destiny for all who repent and believe this Good News. In Jesus, "He has delivered us from the Kingdom of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves" (Col. 1:13).

and trust in Christ as our Saviour we truly have. And God wants to use His church to shine His light, His goodness, and to manifest His Gospel for the world to see. How do we do that? We ask ourselves this question, 'How does Christ's life shine in my life?' 'Are we as a congregation manifesting the light of Jesus?'

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