The Venerable Rena Turnham his
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 22, 2024
St. John the Baptist – Minneapolis

Last week, Rev. Lisa spoke in her sermon about saying YES and being READY. Saying YES to committing to loving God and loving your neighbor and listening for that invitation in our own lives.

This is what it means to live fully as a person of faith—to give everything away, including your life.

To live this way, the WAY OF LOVE, is in every sense, LIFE CHANGING.

This morning, we hear about Mary's life and witness- her readiness, her YES.

She's a saint, literally!

And that's because she not only talks and walks the WAY of LOVE, she's the God-bearer with her whole self, body and soul.

Mary's YES changes her experience in the world, changes the trajectory of her life, and changes the world.

St. Mary and her story have been pivotal in my discernment towards becoming a deacon.

I had a moment in my discernment, (there were a few!) when I felt stuck, unsure of where I was heading. I felt rudderless.

I remember the moment…I was home alone in December and in my living room. Dusk was approaching and I could feel myself enveloping into the darkness that was setting in. I was feeling anxious. I was sitting still in that moment, when I felt a sudden surge in my body, and I jumped up and I raised my fist into the air, and I yelled, "I can't do this by myself!"

When I heard the sound of my own voice, I listened to what I had been unable to articulate up until that point.

It was at that moment that I knew I wasn't alone, that there was NO DOING THIS ALONE.

And then I turned my head, and I peered over to the icon my parents had given me. It's an icon of Mary holding Jesus.

And I looked into Mary's eyes.

And she was looking back at me; through me, it seemed.

A calm came over me and in that moment I knew that I wasn't alone, and that with God's help, I could let go and follow God's lead, to wherever I was heading.

I drew courage from Mary's readiness and her YES.

By now it was dark outside, and my path forward was now illuminated.

Now I'm no Mary, but I do know by her life and witness how powerful saying YES is, how letting go and letting God LEAD is, and how her gaze into my soul has changed me, has changed my experience, has changed my life's trajectory.

Mary's YES to God not only points to but IS the intersection of faith and justice, which is the life of Jesus, the Way of Love.

Dear sweet, sweet Mary, Betrothed to Joseph. Mother of Jesus.

Or is she Mary "the Heavyweight of Hope?" The Mary, who carries the WAY of LOVE into a dark world, a world waiting for hope in kings and in empires.

Instead, God gives us a savior, born a vulnerable baby, born to a refugee family, who grows into an outcast radical who preaches revolution that changes the world.

The words of Mary that we heard today, known as the Magnificat, are **so revolutionary** that some have banned its recitation aloud. There are examples of this in modern times—in the 80s, in Argentina, India, and Guatemala. This is because these words are so threatening to the status quo and those whose empires rest on the backs of the poor and oppressed.

By many, it's considered subversive and revolutionary because it speaks of:

God's dream for all who are marginalized and forgotten

Bringing down the mighty from their thrones

Exalting the lowly

Filling the hungry with good things

Today, as I listen to Mary's words, I can't help but think of the families from Ecuador we've been accompanying for a year.

They're currently transitioning from our financial support to becoming financially independent, just at a time when their future is dim with uncertainty.

Will they find work that will feed and clothe their children?

Will they find shelter, safety and security?

Will they have to be on the move, once again?

A move that will uproot their children to seek shelter from a world that seems to say that they're not worthy of basic necessities and the right to live without fear and violence.

It seems like they are becoming **people of nowhere, and everywhere, at the same time**.

This is the very way Jesus came into the world, and these are the very people Jesus was WITH and FOR in every way.

This is the world we live in, where the story of the Holy Family and their vulnerability is being played out daily in real time.

Where is the hope for this family, for the world?

This hope is the justice that Mary's speaks of.

With Christmas just around the corner, it's easy to miss Mary's radical, prophetic, life-changing, world-changing words**.**

Mary proclaims Jesus as Lord - a proclamation of God's justice for ALL people, especially for the poor and the outcast.

This is the reordering of the social structures envisioned by the prophet Isaiah—a restoration, one that was brought forth, most unexpectedly, in the birth of a fragile newborn child.

This stark contrast is the reality that comes with the incarnation, what Mary not only points to, but is a bridge to**, a literal lifeline**, as she accepts and plays out her role as God-bearer.

How might we hold together these contrasting and yet coexisting images—the expectant hope and joy in the birth of Jesus, and the mercy and justice he brings to the poor and the oppressed?

As we await Christ's coming, may we hold these realities together, as firmly and as gently, as Mary did.

With God's help, WE WILL, by living our lives as if the sake of the world depends upon it. Because it does.

Hear Mary's words again, to give voice to how God responds to the cries of the poor and the oppressed, in THIS TIME and in THIS PLACE:

> "My soul magnifies the Lord,
> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
> Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
> and holy is his name.
> His mercy is for those who fear him
> from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

Amen