

Haydenville Congregational Church
The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian
December 18, 2011~Advent 4
Luke 1:47-55

“Already, Not Yet”

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

When Alice and Bonnie were expecting Jesse Sky, they did what most parents do in anticipation of the baby’s arrival: they prepared the baby’s room.

Bonnie and Alice dedicated a room in their Easthampton home to the little boy soon to be born. They painted the room, bought a crib, and put a rocking chair in the corner. Bonnie made curtains and Alice drew stencils on the walls. They put teddy bears on shelves and hung a mobile from the ceiling. They made the room soft and warm, filled with delicious colors. There were toys ready to play with and bears ready to hug. When Alice was pregnant, I went to visit them and saw Jesse’s room. The room was so full and beautiful that it almost seemed like the baby had already arrived!

Standing in the completely furnished and decorated room, it was like Jesse Sky was here already. Looking at Alice’s big tummy, I was reminded: not yet.

That paradox of **already/not yet** is what Advent is all about. We already know the story, we already know the baby was born. In fact we know about Jesus’ whole life and have memorized many things that he said. Advent certainly holds the **ALREADY**. But it also holds the **NOT YET**...we wait, watch and prepare for the coming of the Christ child. During Advent, which is like a little Lent, we anticipate the baby’s arrival. During Advent, Jesus is not here yet, he will not be born until Christmas Day. But we already know and love him. **Already/not yet.**

Today’s reading from the Book of Luke is filled with the paradox of the already/not yet. This short passage, Luke 1:47-55 called The Magnificat, contains some of the most famous verses in the New Testament. This is Mary’s song of praise in response to her pregnancy and her awareness, at least in part, of its theological significance.

Mary's song, which scholars believe is based on the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, is one of four poems in the Bible placed in the mouths of women who play key roles in the lives of ancient Israel. Those women are Miriam (Exodus 15); Deborah (Judges 5); Hannah and now Mary. All of the songs of these women are placed in the Biblical narrative at key points in the history of the Israelites: the exodus from Egypt; the formation of Israel during the period of the judges and Philistine oppression; and the Roman occupation, colonization and oppression. All of the women's songs—Miriam's, Deborah's, Hannah's and Mary's—have some relation to the liberation of ancient Israel from oppression.

In today's reading, the Magnificat, Mary is pregnant and she sings a song praising God and declaring that God is doing a new thing. God's son is coming into the world and she will bear that son. This teen-age Jewish girl not only accepts her calling but sings praise to God for God's amazing grace.

Mary will bear the son of God, and that son will change the world. That son will speak about, preach about, and try to create, try to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom of God—so long anticipated, so long promised to the people of Israel, so long expected— not here, not yet.

But...what catches our attention is that as Mary sings her song announcing how the wrongs of history will soon be made right, she sings in the past tense. She sings about the wonders of God the Father who has already acted in history, who has already moved in and through the people of Israel. And so the past tense is appropriate...but her song of praise describes precisely what Jesus WILL DO in the future. Mary sings in the past tense about the mighty works of God...but she also describes with amazing clarity what Jesus will accomplish in the years ahead. It is a remarkable juxtaposition. Mary sings about what God has done in the past, AND exactly what Jesus will do in the future. The already/not yet...captured in the Magnificat.

Mary's song contains no less than seven proclamations about what God has already done. Notice the powerful language she uses...God, Mary sings,
“has shown strength...”
“has scattered the proud...”
“has brought down the powerful”
“has lifted up the lowly...”
“has filled the hungry...”
“has sent the rich away empty...”
and “has helped Israel...”

Mary's song is all about what God has already accomplished, even as she awaits the birth of Jesus who will fulfill the words of the prophets and will do exactly what she describes. Already/not yet. Mary is carrying the child who will show strength, scatter the proud, bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, fill the hungry, send the rich away empty, and help Israel. Jesus will, in his ministry, do all those things. Mary, pregnant, sings a song about what the baby she is carrying will accomplish as a man. Jesus has not been born, not yet, not when Mary lifts this song. But her song of praise details precisely what her baby son will do in his lifetime. God has accomplished great things **already**...Jesus is coming to fulfill the words of the prophets...but he is not here. Not yet.

Already/not yet.

We must learn from our sister Mary how to inhabit the world of already/not yet. We must learn, as Mary did, how to move in that world, how to live with that paradox, how to carry that contradiction.

During his ministry, Jesus traveled the countryside teaching and preaching—and he talked about the kingdom of God more than he talked about anything else. The kingdom of God...also called the dream of God, is that place like heaven on earth, that place where justice reigns and peace prevails, that place where the sick are cared for, the weak are powerful, the poor are honored, and the those who mourn are comforted. The kingdom of God...that place, that time when children are safe, fairness triumphs, equity abounds and love is supreme.

The kingdom of God—it is not just what Jesus TALKED about while he was on earth. It was what Jesus LIVED while he was on earth. He healed the sick, he loved the poor, he cared for the powerless, he brought down the haughty, he embraced peace, he lived the dream of God. Jesus created moments, hours, and days when the kingdom of God was here, present, on earth.

Because Jesus was the conduit, the vessel, the channel that allowed for the inbreaking of the kingdom, he gave his followers a taste of what the kingdom of God was like. And he told them essentially: do this, create this here on earth. Fill your lives and fill this land with justice, peace, compassion, love, fairness, equity. Watch me. Follow me. Do this now.

With his friends and followers, Jesus created the kingdom of God here on earth **already**...and yet he lived during the Roman occupation of ancient Israel with war and violence, brutality and poverty, oppression and suffering all around him.

Jesus created the inbreaking of the kingdom wherever he went in whatever he did. He created the kingdom of God around him...**already**. But he lived in a time of empire. The kingdom of God was not present **not yet**. Already/not yet.

And so we model our lives after our sister Mary and our brother Jesus. We model our lives after them and we live inside the paradox of already/not yet.

We hear the Magnificat, the song of Mary, filled with the certainty that God has already shown strength, scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, lifted the lowly, filled the hungry, sent the rich away, and helped Israel.

Already.

But Jesus is in Mary's womb—and he will fulfill the prophesy and accomplish all those things exactly when he arrives. She is pregnant. Jesus is not here. Not yet.

My precious sisters and brothers, we are called to model our lives after Mary and Jesus. We are charged with creating the inbreaking of the kingdom of God on earth...with our acts of compassion and service, our love for the poor, our generosity and our work for justice, our commitment to peace and our allegiance to fairness and equity.

Praise God, we are active, committed Jesus-followers and we are good at creating moments of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God: ALREADY.

But we see the inequality, exploitation, poverty, and violence around us in this world and we say: NOT YET.

We are faithful...we continue Jesus' ministry with our own lives, in our own time. We create the inbreaking of the kingdom: the kingdom is here! Already!

But we see the suffering that exists in the world around us: the kingdom is not here, not yet.

Already/not yet. Mary held that paradox. Jesus lived that paradox and we must as well.

We must work always to creating the kingdom of God on earth, even while we acknowledge the pain in this beautiful but broken world.

We live inside that paradox...already/not yet...

And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

⁴⁸ *for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*

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

⁴⁹ *for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

⁵⁰ *His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*

LYNN FOGG STANDS AND READS: Attack in Belgian City Leaves 5 Dead,
122 Wounded

⁵² *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*

ANNIE STANDS/READS: Aid for Child Care Drops When It is Needed Most

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

FRED G STANDS AND READS: Census: 1 in 2 people are poor or low-income

⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

RICK STANDS AND READS: Mosque is Attacked After Demolition
at Settler Outpost

⁵⁵ *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'*

ANNIE STANDS AND READS: State wins \$50M federal grant for early
education

ANDREA SAYS: ALREADY!!!!!!

ROBERT STANDS AND READS: U.S. Marks End to a 9-Year War in an
Uncertain Iraq

ANDREA SAYS: ALREADY!!!!!!

ANDREA:

Already/not yet... both are true.

Amen.