**Prophet Mary Sings**

**Narrative Lectionary Advent IV**

**December 18, 2016**

Luke 1: 26-55 Russell Mitchell-Walker

[Shane Claiborne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shane_Claiborne), a Christian activist and founder of a [new monasticism](http://www.thesimpleway.org/) for our time, was at [Standing Rock](http://standwithstandingrock.net/) with the indigenous water protectors, standing against the [Dakota Access Pipeline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakota_Access_Pipeline_protests). He [describes](http://convergenceus.org/blog/2016/12/5/the-glory-of-the-lord-at-standing-rock) his experience December 5:

Yesterday was a beautiful reminder in the long struggle for justice that no matter how long we have to wait, God hears their cry. And love and justice will win.

A few weeks ago, Chief Arvol Looking Horse issued an invitation to clergy and faith leaders to stand in solidarity with the people of Standing Rock. He said he was hoping maybe a hundred would respond. But yesterday I joined thousands in a procession of faith leaders to gather around the sacred fire at the Oceti Sakowin Camp at Standing Rock. I knew something special was happening here.

As the entire camp held hands in prayer, we learned that the US Army Corps of Engineers had refused to grant an easement to complete the Dakota Access Pipeline, a $3.8 billion project that stretches across four states. From the beginning, the pipeline has been resisted as a “black snake” that threatens the sacred waters of the Sioux people. And in recent months, pipeline construction destroyed holy sites.

But Native American tribes from some 200 nations came together here to protect their water and resist the Dakota Access Pipeline. Yesterday, they won.

The gathering at Standing Rock was a camp of prayer and ceremony. There was no alcohol, drugs or weapons allowed – In an [article](http://www.eaglefeathernews.com/news/index.php?detail=2451) in Eagle Feather News, a group from Cumberland House quoted the sign as you entered the camp that said “Absolutely no drugs or alcohol on you or in you, this is a camp of prayer and ceremony”. It was sacred ground, sacred space. It was in this sacred space that authorities sent attack dogs, rubber bullets, and water cannons in freezing temperatures on the people. Yet the people prevailed and non-violence won. The lowly have been lifted up and affirmed.

Elements of Mary’s song, the Magnificat coming true. Once Mary has shared her news and experience with her Aunt Elizabeth, she feels blessed and sings. Her response is directly connected with her ability to share her story with Elizabeth and Elizabeth’s response. Once she shares her story she sings praise to God probably out of knowing she had been heard and that her witness had meaning for Elizabeth. Elizabeth’s response is one that is kind and just. She generously accepts Mary, as a young pregnant woman who is not married and is able to be present to Mary out of that generosity and grace. It emphasizes the importance of us being able to share our experience and be heard, for us to be present to hearing when someone is sharing a deep experience with us. Out of this experience Mary sings.

Her song is one of good news for the lowly and poor. As one who knows the experience of oppression from Roman occupation, she feels hope in the message that God has brought to her through this expectancy, this coming child she knows to be special. Mary is a prophet, called by God, to be a special messenger. Mary is often portrayed as submissive and gentle, but she is outspoken, bold for justice and courageous. Here she sings a song of praise to God who challenges the status quo, lifts up someone like her to be the bearer of God’s son. God is not something removed from us, but integrated in union with us, in Mary. The call that Mary sings is a call that extends to us all. A call that has been lived out by many at Standing Rock. A call that will continue to be lived out as we find invitations and ways to stand with those who are oppressed, suffering, poor.

Mary’s response to the message from the angel Gabriel is one of strength and courage. Once she gets over the shock and fear, and understands the message, she is not submissive but rather affirmative. She is a strong woman, after all she traveled alone through the hills to go see Elizabeth. As a woman this would have been very unusual. Gabriel also speaks to Mary with great dignity, affection and honour. There is no subordination or violation in any way, which would have been the usual experience in stories of a divine mortal encounter in the time. Hence Mary’s initial reaction is fear – she is afraid she will be raped. Gabriel as God’s messenger, transforms this expectation and brings a different message and experience. The [Storytelling Commentary](http://gotell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Lk01_26-38_commentary.pdf), by Thomas Boomershine says: “God’s relationship with us is seen in his relationship with Mary. God invites her into a full and open partnership of love for the redemption of the lowly. At the core of that partnership is a transformation of the role of our sexuality. Rather than a source of domination, manipulation, and conflict, our sexuality is the means of God’s grace in which God offers to Mary and she agrees with dignity that her body will be the means of God’s bringing to birth new life and hope for the world.” A hope that will bring a different kind of peace to those who come in contact with that Life.

While Mary’s song brings hope to many, it contains challenging words for many of us who are rich and full in the global context. The only way for us to sing this song with the same kind of joy, the joy of the lowly lifted up, is if we engage in the work of justice and restoration. For us to lift up the lowly and work for and with those who are disenfranchised. Whether that is through our work with IMCF, or Wascana Rehab services, which is happening today, or connecting with wider issues of truth and reconciliation, working against violence against women and children, Black Lives Matters, there are many opportunities. We can’t do it all, but we can do something. Many believe that with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s announcement that the Kinder Morgan pipeline will go through that this is such a grave concern for indigenous people across the country and environmentalists, that it will be our Standing Rock. Trudeau has been criticized for his approval of these pipelines that they are in direct conflict with his climate change policy. It is challenging times we live in. Are we prepared to stand with the lowly, to resist systems that create the separation between rich and poor, and work toward restoration for justice and fairness for all? This is the challenge of Mary’s bold song. This is the message of peace for this season - a peace with justice, a peace that is good news to the poor, the lowly, the hungry.

May we seek this peace. May we see Mary in a new light, as prophet, as a strong young woman, bold and courageous, calling us to live out our faith, and see hope in the peace of the Christ who comes.