

8.15.21 MaryMotherLord God's Prophet for Good Trouble

- Marian Blue is a color... it's close to the color of the blue sky on a cloudless day
 - Marian Blue got its name because so many paintings show Mary the Mother of Jesus dressed in blue
 - But then I wondered why this color of blue was used so often for Mary
 - It seems that in olden times, blue was the most expensive color for dyes or paints, because the blue was only made from a rare mineral that had to be imported from what is now Afghanistan, and which was usually reserved for painting portraits of kings and queens
 - So blue, what is now called Marian Blue, was the color of royalty, and that expensive color was used to honor Mary when artists painted her
- Through the years, Mary has been honored like royalty, but she has also been honored for her obedience
 - In the gospel story that we usually hear in Advent, when Gabriel appeared to Mary – a young, unmarried girl in Nazareth – the angel said, “Greetings, favored one!... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High... [see Luke 1:28-35]”
 - And then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word. [1:38]”
 - So yes, in response to the surprising and shocking news that she would impossibly have a child, Mary was obedient
- Royal and obedient for sure, but the important witness of Mary that is often either forgotten or glossed over, is that Mary was a prophet
 - In today's gospel reading, we hear the words that we so often sing in Evening Prayer or for Sunday hymns
 - And yet, as beautiful as those words are, we often don't realize how shocking they are
 - The first half of what Mary says and that we so often sing is a hymn of praise, magnifies and gives praise and glory to the Lord

- But the second half of what Mary says, and that we so often sing, has a prophetic voice:
 - [The Lord] has shown strength with his arm;
 - [The Lord] has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
 - [The Lord] has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 - and lifted up the lowly;
 - [The Lord] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. [1:51-53]
- These are not empty cliches heaped up one upon another – this is Mary’s witness that the child that she would birth and mother would embody God’s power and authority to change the very structures of the world
- To those who are rich, to those who are stuffed full like the rich man who feasted while his poor neighbor Lazarus starved to death near his door in the parable that the grown up Jesus told some years later – to the powerful and proud who ignore and abuse the poor – to them, Mary’s words are a warning
 - Just forty years ago, the church in Argentina was forbidden by its government from reading or singing Mary’s prophetic words for fear that Christians might actually take these words seriously, and then revolt against their murderous leaders
 - And I suspect that if we printed up Mary’s prophetic words and hung them on a big banner outside our church, that many people who drive or walk by would either feel threatened or offended
 - And for us, if we take Mary’s prophetic words about her son Jesus, who was born to first give a glimpse of God’s power, and then died to show that even in handing over his power to endure death on the cross – that even in weakness, the strength of God was and still is greater than the power of sin and death – if we take Mary’s prophetic words about Jesus seriously, then the mission of the church will include stirring up trouble in the world by opposing pride, human power, and poverty-ignoring wealth
- Mary would have us know that in the fulness of time God will unseat the powerful and take down the proud, and so the

mission of the church needs to either warn or offensive what the world so often celebrates and worships – power and wealth

- It's over a year now since United States representative John Lewis died
 - When Lewis was young, he preached to the chickens that his share-cropper parents raised on their little farm
 - When he was older, John became a pastor and civil rights leader.
 - He suffered a fractured skull from a policeman's billyclub when on Bloody Sunday in 1965 he tried to lead protesters in Selma across the Edmund Pettis Bridge to secure voting rights for all people
 - A few years later, voters elected John Lewis to City Council in Atlanta, and then to congress, where he served for 33 years until his death last year
 - However a phrase that John Lewis often used to describe his work, was "good trouble"
 - He saw that his mission in life was to cause "good trouble" by stirring up change against the powers of this world
 - To be honest, John Lewis was a thorn – he was an absolute thorn in the side of both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
 - Yet when John Lewis died, Pelosi called him the "conscience of congress" and McConnell called him a model of courage and a "peacemaker."
 - It seems that John Lewis took Mary's prophetic words seriously, and sometime people listened, and sometimes the world even changed a little bit
- So today we honor the witness of Mary the Mother of Our Lord who even Martin Luther honored as the Mother of Jesus
 - Yes, she often painted in the blue color of royalty
 - And yes, she was obedient to God
 - But she was also a prophet – she could see the long view, the long arc of history, where the child Jesus would both conquer sin and death but also in the fulness of time bring down the proud, the powerful, and the poverty-ignoring wealthy
 - And taking that prophetic message seriously, the church is called to welcome people into God's love, declare

forgiveness through the cross and resurrection of Christ,
and to stir up “good trouble” for the sake of Lazarus, and
all the poor and powerless people of the world who are
also children of God, and our neighbors