

Magnifying the Vision  
Luke 1:46-55

A sermon by Meighan Pritchard  
Prospect United Church of Christ  
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She was young, alone, and pregnant. Not particularly pretty or popular. Definitely poor.

She wasn't sure how she felt about having this baby. What kind of world is this? Immigrants being hunted down like thieves, peaceful protestors being pepper sprayed and shot with rubber bullets or doused with water cannons, people of color being assassinated by police, the rich having everything and the bottom 99% having the rest, Muslims becoming targets just for existing. Human rights being trampled left and right. Housing prices going crazy, and more and more people ending up on the streets. Give to Caesar or the landlord or the government every last penny, every last stitch that you own, and watch Caesar take away all the social network support systems anyway.

On the day after the inauguration, everyone in town seemed to be heading to Judkins Park for the Womxn's March. She was waiting at a bus stop to go there, but the buses were passing by already full. Someone had called an Uber cab and had room for one more, so she squeezed in, and off they went to join the throngs.

The park was surging with people and pink hats. The energy and excitement were palpable. People had all kinds of signs. Some people had taken what had been intended as a slap in the face and turned it into their motto: "Nasty Woman" or one woman's sign said, "Nasty Latina."

There were speakers quoting all sorts of people.  
"It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." [Assata Shakur]

Someone else quoted James Baldwin, and the imagery really resonated for her in her situation:  
An old world is dying, and a new one, kicking in the belly of its mother, time, announces that it is ready to be born. This birth will not be easy, and many of us are doomed to discover that we are exceedingly clumsy midwives. No matter, so long as we accept that our responsibility is to the newborn: the acceptance of responsibility contains the key to the necessarily evolving skill. [James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*]

Eventually the marchers started out on the route. It took forever for all the people even to drain out of the park, there were so many of them. She shuffled along with the joyous throng, reading people's signs. She felt part of something big, something creatively defiant. Something hopeful.

About halfway along the route she lost steam and pulled over to the sidewalk to sit on some steps for a few minutes. The people flowed on by, wearing all kinds of pink hats, carrying a million signs.

“Is this where the pregnant people take a break?” asked one woman, panting. She was old—at least 35. Without waiting for an answer, she sat down on the step with a big sigh and took off a backpack. And she was visibly pregnant, too. She set down her sign, which had a picture of the Statue of Liberty and the words “I’m with her.”

“Holy moly,” said the older woman. “Usually I can take a good march, but this whole pregnancy thing just wears me out. Look at these ankles! No going the extra mile for me. Liz is my name.” She offered her hand.

“Maria,” said the young woman, and shook the hand.

“Isn’t this exciting?” said Liz, looking out at the sea of people streaming past them. “The organizers were hoping for 50,000 people. I wonder how many people actually showed up. Because I’m guessing this is way more than 50,000. What a day!”

“Yes,” said Maria, suddenly tongue-tied.

“I’ve been trying to have a baby for God knows how long,” said Liz. “Wouldn’t you know it would finally happen when the world is looking this messed up! So even as I’m preparing the baby for the world, I’ve got to show up at events like this to prepare the world for my baby.”

“What?” said Maria, not quite following.

“I’ve got to make sure the world is a good enough place to bring up a baby *in*. And right now it’s a disaster! Our work is cut out for us! Don’t you think?”

“Actually, yeah.”

“You want a hat?” asked Liz. “I’ve been taken with the urge to knit. Maybe it’s hormones. I made a dozen pink hats.”

“Sure,” said Maria. Liz rummaged around in her backpack and pulled out a hat. Thick pink yarn, a bit of a cable stitch up the middle. Maria put it on. She felt more official, somehow.

“We’ve got to get off our addiction to fossil fuels,” Liz continued. “Fossil fuels and fear: the three F’s. Nobody’s going to do that willingly, though. We have to show the will and the way. We have to *make* it happen, regardless of what they’re doing in DC. We can’t wait for them to make up their minds. The world will be downright crispy by then. What’s that Gandhi quote? ‘Be the change you wish to see in the world.’ Right. So I gave up my car a while back; I guess I’ll be one of those bicycling parents with a kid in tow, where the helmet is practically bigger than the kid. But we’ll make it work. I’ll be that hippie, tofu-eating, community-garden-planting, solar panels-on-the-roof, carbon neutral holier-than-thou liberal telling everyone else what they’re doing wrong and not noticing that I’m the worst of the bunch. Log in my own eye, and all that. My kid will probably rebel by becoming some hyper-wealthy CEO, all about material stuff and greed and money.”

“Or maybe our kids will finally get it right,” said Maria. “Maybe if we lay the groundwork, they’ll actually create the world that people can live in.”

“You think?” said Liz. “Man, I hope so. It’s so easy to get overwhelmed. Sometimes I get sucked into despair. But then along comes a day like this, where we all come out of the woodwork and stand up for love and justice and peace and joy, and it all seems possible.”

As they sat on the step talking, a young man in scruffy jeans with a big bounce in his gait sprung past them, handing out pieces of paper. They each got one. It was song lyrics. They stood up and rejoined the march as people started to sing:

We are a gentle angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives.  
We are a gentle angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives. [Holly Near]

“It just seems as though everything needs fixing,” said Maria. “It all feels so broken.”

“Yeah,” said Liz. “That’s when you have to step back and look at some of the progress we’ve made. If you forget to celebrate the victories, you forget how things could have been. We could still be driving cars with leaded gasoline. You remember leaded gasoline? Nah, you’re probably too young. We could all be smoking cigarettes and hacking our way through this march if there hadn’t been a massive anti-smoking campaign that actually changed public opinion about smoking. People can now marry whoever they want—who would’ve believed that even five, ten years ago? There are bike lanes all over this city—those are still relatively new. We’re driving electric cars, some of us. Hey, maybe that’s what I’ll do—get an electric car. People have solar panels and wind turbines and heat pumps. If you think about building a new world based on justice and peace and love of your neighbor and all that, well, we’re not starting from scratch. The vision is there. My brother went through a twelve-step program and he talks now about a Higher Power. I’m all about a Higher Power or God or whatever you want to call it. So I started going to church. And I think that Higher Power has been at work for a long time on justice. And we get to be part of that. That’s important. Oh, listen to me: I’m getting all preachy.”

“No, it’s good,” said Maria. “I don’t know what I believe. But it feels to me that if I could figure that piece out—figure out what I’m supposed to do and how I fit into the universe—then my life would have meaning.”

“Exactly!” said Liz. “You could be the next Martin Luther King or something. He was amazing, how he gave himself so completely to the work of civil rights. We’re still fighting a lot of those same battles—look at the Black Lives Matter movement, and Ferguson, and all. But he showed us the way. And he had a vision, too. That very last speech, where it’s almost like he knew he was going to be killed, he said ‘I have been to the mountaintop and looked across the River Jordan to the Promised Land.’ If we stand up against oppression, learn how to love our enemies, even when they are stealing our stuff and slapping us around, get a handle on the things we’re afraid of as a society, like equality and brown skinned people—then I think we’re on the right track. We might have to shift away from the greed of capitalism, though. Learn to share, live with less. But I think it could be a joyful way to live.”

By the time they reached the end of the march at Seattle Center, Maria felt as if she had known Liz forever. They exchanged phone numbers and agreed to meet for coffee a few days later. Liz said something about birthing classes, and a trip to Olympia to talk to their legislators about the world they wanted to see for their babies.

After Liz left, Maria sat on the grass for a while, thinking. What was being born in them—and in the world? How was it that standing up to oppression and greed and evil could be the impetus, the kick in the butt they were waiting for, to get serious about birthing the world they wanted to see? And how was that a joyful thing?

And she thought, too, of something Liz had said when she got on a roll about church: “We are all children of God, blessed and beautiful, flawed and forgiven, gifted with grace. We get this opportunity to give birth to something in our lives, something holy. Maybe it’s a baby, as in our cases. Maybe it’s a new world. Maybe it’s both. What is God’s vision, and how do we get in sync with it so we can magnify that vision? And whatever it is, this thing we give birth to, how will it make us dance with joy and expectation of what is possible? How will we live into every single day to make that new world a reality? How will we stand up—joyfully, defiantly, creatively, *together*—in the face of cruelty, injustice, hate, greed, and fear? Both Out There in the world as well as in us?”

She was young, pregnant. Not particularly pretty or popular. Definitely poor. But she was not alone. She was starting to glimpse a plan, something that gave her life meaning and could make a good world for this baby. As she sank onto her mattress that night, she read back over the lyrics sheet. One song reminded her of those labor breathing exercises she had heard of—the ones she would learn when she joined Liz’s birthing class. The words said,

There’s a new world coming,  
There’s a new world coming,  
There’s a new world coming,  
I can hear her breathing: huh, huh, ahhh,  
I can hear her breathing: huh, huh, ahhh.  
[song by Betsy Rose, inspired by Arundhati Roy]

Amen.