

North Main, 12.17.17

Advent3PeaceNM121717

Title: *Confirmation Bias*

Texts: Luke 1:46b– 55. Scripture reading: Psalm 126.

Some 1800 years ago men and women retreated to lonely places to escape the stresses of daily life and developed *Lectio Divina* or *Sacred Reading*. Traditionally it involved a *slow reading* of a biblical text and allowing the words to speak in new ways. There are three parts to a *Lectio Divina* exercise.

Reading (lectio) As I read, listen to this passage as if it were a long awaited letter. Listen expectantly, in a way that savors each word and sentence. Listen for a word or phrase that touches you, resonates, attracts or even disturbs you.

Reflecting (meditatio) Ponder this word or phrase for a minute. Let it sink in slowly and deeply. Rest in it. Listen for what the word or phrase is saying to you, what it may be offering to you, what it may be demanding of you.

Expressing (oratio) When you're ready, openly and honestly express the word or phrase that spontaneously registered within you.

The aim is to move into the depths of silence and stillness where one can hear the Word of God spoken in love and respond to this Word, while dwelling there in the presence of God.

This morning we are going to do this with Luke 1:46-55, a text that is familiar to many of us. It is spoken by Mary when she visits her cousin Elizabeth. When Mary greets Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist, John moves within Elizabeth's womb. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith. Mary responds with what is known as the Magnificat.

As I read this passage, what resonates in you, touches your emotions, triggers a thought.

Luke 2:46-55. Silence.

So, what captured your attention? Raise your hand. I will bring you the microphone.

As I read the text again, let's switch things up a bit. In addition to the word or phrase that touched you, attracted or even disturbed you, this time what do you . . .

\$ hear?

\$ see?

\$ smell?

\$ touch?

\$ taste?

What did you hear, see, smell, touch, taste?

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we hear a lot about peace on earth, good will to everyone. Mary's song soars with eloquent, powerful words. Speaking of God, she says:

He has demonstrated power with his arm; he has scattered those whose pride wells up from the sheer arrogance of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up those of lowly position; he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty (1:51-53).

Peace on earth? Good will to everyone? Hardly. Mary's song alludes to things like wholeness, well-being, shalom. Mary birthed our Christ in a tumultuous time. We read it in a tumultuous time. How do we hold Mary's towering language in one hand and our realities in the other?

I admit to confirmation bias. When I read Scripture, I often find what I look for, especially in familiar texts like this one. What I hear, what I look for, in Mary's Magnificat is encouragement, belief that somehow, some day, all things will be well. Somehow, some day, God will set things aright. Somehow, some day, if I wait long enough, evil overreaches, dismantles itself. Somehow, some day, if I wait long enough, the justice and peace of Jesus will prevail.

But confirmation bias, applied to this text, causes me to miss something:

He has demonstrated power with his arm; he has scattered those whose pride wells up from the sheer arrogance of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up those of lowly position; he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty (vv. 51-53).

This part of the Magnificat makes me cringe a little, because I reside in an arrogant nation. I live in a nation whose pride is beyond healthy. I live in a nation where injustice is most frequently visited on the poor. And what makes me personally uncomfortable, is that, measured globally, I am among the world's wealthy. Mary's words cause me to look in the mirror, to examine personal motives and conduct, push me to compare myself to the teachings of her adult son.

As is often the case, Scripture holds a message of consolation and distress, inspiration and agitation, comfort and unease. They're all in this text. What's my takeaway? Mostly, it depends on what I'm looking for.

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