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First Christian Church  
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## On Making Sure that Your Heart is Connected to the Rest of You

From Isaiah 11

adapted from The Message

A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump, from his roots a budding Branch. The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him, the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding, the Spirit that gives direction and builds strength, the Spirit that instills knowledge and Awe-of-God. Awe-of-God will be all his joy and delight.

He won't judge by appearances, won't decide on the basis of hearsay.

He'll judge the needy by what is right, render decisions on earth's poor with justice.

His words will bring everyone to awed attention. A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.

The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid.

Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them.

Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill on my holy mountain.

The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

Luke 1:46-55

New International Version

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

*There was a storm brewing.* In fact, it turned out to be a very unusual, very out-of-season, December hurricane that was threatening those in its path. In one town, the winds began to pick up and the forecast got more dire and families began bringing things in and securing other stuff and making sure they had enough supplies to try to

ride out this storm. Because it was December, lots of homes had already put up their simple or elaborate outdoor Christmas displays and these too needed to be dealt with. The town was the mythical Springfield, and the couple was named Homer and Marge Simpson and their next-door-neighbor Ned Flanders. And as the winds got stronger, Ned turned to Homer and said: *“Oooh, I better go take down the Manger scene. If baby Jesus gets loose upon the world, [He] could do some real damage!”*<sup>1</sup>

*There was a storm brewing.* In fact, that storm had already arrived, gale-force. And this time it was not in any mythical locale but in the very real, very beleaguered land of Judea two-thousand years ago. The winds of unjust taxation – up to 80% on peasant farmers that left them chronically hungry and malnourished – from an evil local king to finance his lavish lifestyle; the winds of callous – no, horrific – imperial social policy that valued girl babies at virtually nothing and allowed and even encouraged couples to quietly do away with them after birth; the winds of social structures that gave women virtually no rights and assured that the most impoverished and threatened in that society would always be the women and the children and the elderly. And, then, as scripture tells us, *“Mary gave birth to her first-born and laid him in the manger...”* And Ned was right, *If baby Jesus gets loose upon the world, [He] could do some real damage!”* For He **did** get loose into the world and His followers have indeed done some real damage to that practice of female infanticide and to the customs of abandoning the elderly and to women and children being nothing more than chattel property and people being allowed to own other human beings and so much more and

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<sup>1</sup><http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0701131/quotes> I have taken some slight liberty with the quote for homiletical emphasis. See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane\\_Neddy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Neddy)

with, thanks be to God, so much more “damage” continuing to be done by that Jesus still loose in the world.

*There was a storm brewing.* It is a storm twenty centuries later in a land where it is

- often harder to adopt a puppy than it is to purchase an assault rifle;
- a land where civility and compassion are too often seen as signs of weakness rather than strength;
- a land where this and that group squabble over who is more “pure” while things that they *could* agree on and confront like the fact that child pornography is the fastest growing online business<sup>2</sup> take a back seat to slogan-slinging and point-scoring;
- a land where too many people have experienced too much of the church as a place that spent too much of its energy bashing on those who were “different” somehow;
- a land where increasingly it too often was eerily looking like that first century as children and elderly and women were more likely to be living in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

And, my friends, it all leads me to say that Ned’s statement – *If baby Jesus gets loose upon the world, [He] could do some real damage!*” – ought to be my daily prayer and my daily inspiration to help be one of those who follow Him in doing damage to those practices and customs and structures that hurt and maim and destroy too many lives,

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.enough.org/inside.php?tag=statistics>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.npc.umich.edu/poverty/>

too many hopes.

*There was a storm brewing.* Mary knew it. Did you hear her song about what God was doing through her? *“...he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”* This is indeed stormy stuff, revolutionary stuff, even. *If baby Jesus gets loose upon the world, [He] could do some real damage!*” In the 1980s, the government of Guatemala knew how revolutionary it was, knew the “damage” that this Jesus could indeed do, for they made it illegal to recite Mary’s song in any public gathering, including worship. For they knew, as unjust rulers down through the centuries have known, that the story of Christmas, the story of the incarnation is not just a “sweet, sentimental tale,” full of, as my wife, the Rev. Barbara Blaisdell, puts it, “fluffy chubby cherubs,”<sup>4</sup> No, it is indeed a **revolutionary** tale that reminds us that the God whom we worship has always had and continues to have a passion for justice and a heart for the poor. And so those who have used their money and their power to make sure that some are mired in the muck of poverty and crime and hopelessness, Mary’s song and the “damage” that Jesus intends to do let loose upon the world, is not good news. For those whose pride in their accomplishments or possessions or attitudes or politics has somehow made them see some of their fellow human beings as not-quite-as-worthy as they are or who somehow think they deserve these good things as their right, then Mary’s song and the “damage” that Jesus intends to do let loose upon the world, is not good news.

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<sup>4</sup><http://barbarablaisdell.org/2012/12/19/one-process-theological-response-humbly-offered-in-response-to-recent-events/>

But I need to stop a moment. For it is so, so easy to fall prey to the very thing that Mary is singing of. It is both easy and needful to point out that there are indeed damaging and un-Christian social practices, laws, customs, and leaders in too many places, in this land and too many lands. *But it is not enough.* Finger-pointing rarely is. Because finger-pointing, even the most justified, becomes little more than smug supercilious self-absorption when it is not accompanied by confession and acknowledgment of one's own culpability. And so with a catch of realization in my throat, I realize that Mary is also singing to **me**. For I too have been one who has taken pride in things that I believed made me better than others. I too have been one of those "haughty" ones that Mary sings of. And speaking of leaders, I too have sometimes let lead in my heart and actions and wallet things that are not of God but are simply of my own wants. I too have let myself become rich in things that are fool's' gold, storing up attitudes and beliefs that have allowed me to play my own part in "hurting God's holy mountain."

And yet... Mary's song, that announcement of the One we await on Christmas, that reminder of that Babe let loose upon the world, is not just one more comeuppance story. No, it is a vision, a moral vision, from the God who from the moment of creation has always been about offering hope, offering healing, showing that it is not hate, it is not coercion, it is not weaponry, it is not money, it is not bigotry that are at the heart of creation. No, again in Barbara's powerful words, Mary's song, Jesus loosed upon the world is

...the very good news... that it is God who will finally reign over the power of evil and death, not the Herods and the Caesars; it is Jesus who is working to bring about the

kingdom of God upon this world not the temporary powers and principalities of this world, not the gunmen and the madmen and the schoolyard bullies and the bigger bullies: the warmongers and tax evaders and those of the wealthy who would do anything to keep wealth for their own.... [For] God is doing what God has always been about doing: creating good, bringing order and beauty and hope out of... chaos and disorder and ugliness and despair.<sup>5</sup>

And this, my friends, is indeed good news for you and for me. For it is the reminder that God intends for our hearts – our hearts that so love this time of year, our hearts that so want to believe in that Christmas vision – to be ever more wonderfully and blessedly connected to the rest of us - remaking our convictions and commitments, opening our wallets, moving us beyond suspiciousness and cynicism, repudiating xenophobia and bigotry, offering that vision of life-changing love to all who are “different,” all who have found themselves unjustly or unfairly abraded.

*There is a storm brewing.* It is a storm that portends a day, when, as Isaiah predicted of Him whom we await, indeed “the whole earth will be brimming with... a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.” And because that is so, we too can sing with Mary: **our** souls magnify the Lord for God has done – and continues to do – great things. And at the same time, we can also answer Ned’s question: For we **know**, we **know** what can happen when that baby Jesus gets loosed upon the world! Thanks be to God, **we know!**

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.