

# The Change All Around Us

Luke 1:46-56

Psalm 146:5-10

I would like us to note that the ancient carved valley around us was once a glacier, and was once I believe an ancient sea.

That the forests around us were not all pine.

The the earth tilted and the sun rose, and people spoke languages we do not know  
But still they worried about their crops  
And they tended their children  
And at night they told their stories.

Testimony is that ancient cultures were sophisticated,  
That they prized knowledge even though it could not be written down  
They told long epic tales  
And write down their families stories.

And all of this, all of it is now gone  
Replaced by our community  
With our stories and our hopes and dreams.

I have been reading recently a fascinating book called the "Dawn of Everything" which tells the stories of ancient cultures from North America, to Turkey to France to Egypt,  
And the way that cultures chose different modes of being  
The way that they learned to be wise  
The way that if the culture next to you practised agriculture, then you would remain a hunter gatherer  
Or the way that if the culture next to you kept slaves, then you would avoid slaves  
Or if they had kings, you would avoid hierarchy  
There has been so much change, so much choice,  
For 1,000s and 1,000s of years

This story might point to change as a constant, an evolution,  
But sometimes change is about a reversal, a turning, a move of God into the field of history,  
To bring justice, and to lift up the oppressed and the bring down the powerful on their thrones.

Mary sings about this,

In the past tense, partly because she is so sure, that she knows it and that God will come again  
And partly because it has happened in the past,  
Because that is what God does.

*His mercy is for those who fear him  
From generation to generation  
He has shown strength with his arm  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones  
He has lifted up the lowly  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
And sent the rich away empty.*

Do you notice this great reversal, or the way that Isaiah sees it in Isaiah 35, which is one of the set readings for this Sunday...

*The desert shall rejoice and blossom  
Like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly  
  
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened  
And the ears of the deaf unstopped  
Then the lame shall leap like a deer*

Or from Psalm 146 which was our reading

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob  
Whose hope is in the Lord their God  
Who made heaven and earth  
The sea and all that is in them  
Who keeps faith forever*

*Who executes justice for the oppressed  
Who gives food to the hungry*

*The Lord sets the prisoner free  
The Lord opens the eyes of the blind  
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down  
The Lord loves the righteous*

Or when Jesus speaks of his ministry to John the Baptist

*Go and tell John what you hear and see  
The blind receive their sight  
The lame walk  
The lepers are cleansed  
The deaf hear  
The dead are raised  
The poor have good news preached to them*

This is the sign that God has been at work for John...  
How do I know God has been at work - because strange reversals have been happening  
The world is not as it used to be  
It has moved in the direction of goodness, of hearing, of seeing, of even the dead being raised  
These are things that cannot happen by ordinary human intervention  
They require the move of God.

I am often struck by the way that these oracles move between the past and present and future  
tense  
Mary says he has done this - and this has often been a sign that God has already done it, so surely  
that she can even speak of it in the past, but I think also she means the past.

We know that Mary came from a group of the very poorest people  
Those called the Anawim,  
The poor ones  
And these were people who in their poverty and loss had learned to look for the movement of  
God  
Mary knew the stories for the future, but she also knew them for the past  
And in every generation  
And I love that idea, that God is involved in a constant drama of movement and of change,  
Of transformation and change,  
That Mary does say  
*His mercy is for those who fear him  
From generation to generation*

I want to dwell on that this morning  
That from generation to generation  
God is doing the thing that Mary, and Isaiah and Jesus and the psalmist speak of,  
These great reversals, transformations for good.  
From generation to generation.

## The Dawn of Everything

I have recently been reading a fascinating book of Anthropology called the Dawn of Everything  
It's about the history of ancient societies,  
And refutes the myth that we are all on one incessant conveyor belt of progress  
That we were once hunter gatherers  
And then sometime in Mesopotamia about 10,000 years ago,  
Someone discovered farming  
And this pulled us into back breaking work, and into a world in which we were dominated  
And that this idea spread from Mesopotamia into Europe  
Creating ever more prosperous societies and ever more hierarchies  
And then about 500 years ago we discovered education,  
And became yet more sophisticated still.

It's a very linear and a very arrogant view of history  
Which sees an inexorable line of progress  
And ourselves the pinnacle of human achievement  
Arriving here just in time to destroy ourselves through overheating and over consumption.

The good news is that the truth is far far more sophisticated and different than that  
Societies for many thousands of years intentionally opted not to farm  
That vast trade networks roamed across North America for example,  
And huge cities were built, perhaps for a 1,000 years and then change again  
And that people were clever and educated.

There are accounts of American Native peoples first encountering the French who came from  
Europe  
And being amazed at how uninformed they were  
And how poor they were at handling themselves in discussion and argument  
As opposed to their sophisticated thinking.

And these societies were going for 1,000 of years  
And I think of Mary's reflection  
That God is at work  
Showing mercy to those who fear him  
From generation to generation  
This is what God does, all the time,  
This is how you know God is present, the great reversals are happening  
The deaf hear  
The blind see  
The captive is set free.

And I think of our own nation

Our land actually began life south of the Equator

In an ancient land complex called Laurentia, the vast bulk of which would become North America  
We floated off, and then bumped into England and then Europe

For many years we were covered in snow and ice.

There is no evidence that the Neanderthals managed to make it here.

The first settlers to Scotland came at least 12,000 years ago,

Think of that,

That's 12 times the distance between us and William the Conqueror

Think of all the stories in that time

And God at work

From generation to generation

Letting his mercy being known.

That settlement of 12,000 years is in Howburn Farm, near Elsrickly in South Lanarkshire

The next settlement is of 8,000 years old

So 4,000 years of which we know nothing

That's in Cramond, so it took 4,000 years of work to get from South Lanarkshire to Edinburgh

Then 3,500 year ago, there were settlements found in South Uist and of course Skara Brae in  
Orkney

And in all these

From generation to generation

His mercy is shown

He is making these great reversals

That only God can do, from generation to generation,

The blind seeing

The deaf hearing

The captive set free.

The Crannogs on Loch Tay are 2,500 years old, so by the time Mary was singing, there was  
someone in Perthshire on a 500 year old Crannog, thinking that things never changing

Except he probably wasn't thinking that because I wonder if he knew

That God was at work

And where God is at work

The deaf hear

The blind see

The captive is set free

Do you see these great waves  
And they are still  
These great transformations  
And Advent is a time to tune with these  
To tune with the changes of God  
Which are always in the right direction  
And God is good at this  
Doing this in the past, the present and the future.

Mary knows this,  
She knows what she is a part of.

And I pray this for our nation  
That we be more just  
Our world that we be lovers of the peace  
That somehow God will hold on to all of this.

And we are called to be agents of change  
Agents of renewal

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
Spoke movingly for me of the kind of change that we need  
In painful suffering  
As if it must enter the very muscle, the sinew must be parted  
That this must go to the marrow,  
That the change of God is a piercing, upsetting thing,  
Which means movements in the dark...

De Chardin prayed  
"In all these dark moments, O God, grant that I may understand that it is you who are painfully parting the fibres of my being in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance."

And I wonder where is this for us  
Where is the movement of God  
Where do we sing with Mary  
Even though this will cost us and part us and change us  
Where is the move of God  
To transform

To make this world

More just

More loving

More healed

More beautiful

His mercy is on those who fear him

From generation to generation

He has shown strength with his arm.

AMEN