

The Song of Mary

Luke 1:46-55; 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Sunday, December 22, 2024 The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:49 "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name."

- Introduction: Seeing the Holy Spirit's work in the midst of challenging circumstances.

The gift of discernment

One of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible is the gift of Discernment. People with this gift can see through phony spirituality and can see clearly who would be good for leadership in a church and who would not be. Preaching that runs counter to Scripture and preachers who are hypocrites are often uncomfortable around people with such a gift, because they could not hide their lies and hypocrisy from such people. People with discernment also can have great insight of a positive sort, they can see, or perceive the Holy Spirit at work, even in challenging circumstances. The gift encourages people in difficult times and gives perspective when people consider the value of their days on earth.

- Elijah and His servant, Gehazi

2 Kings includes the exploits and miracles of Elisha and one of them involved discernment. One day, the army of Syria surrounded the city of Dothan simply to capture the great prophet. We pick up the story in chapter six, verse 15: *"And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, My Master! What shall we do?'" So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."* Discernment can be perceiving the work of God in the mundane, or even challenging circumstances in your life.

- Set the Stage

Hannah

Our Old Testament lesson is the prayer of a woman named Hannah who lived so long ago that she predates Solomon's Temple and lived when the Tabernacle was in use. She lived in difficult circumstances at a time of rampant corruption in some of the religious leadership of the day but Hannah's problem was more personal. She was married and wanted children. God heard her prayer and grants her wish and eventually, when he is old enough, she presents her son Samuel to live and at the Tabernacle and be raised by the priests. She and her husband, a man named Elkanah, disappear into the mists of history but we learn that she had several children, and I would imagine, a long and happy life. Her first son, Samuel, turned out to be one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. Sometimes God's answer to prayer is far greater than the request itself. Maybe Hannah realized this. I pretty sure Mary did.

Mary

Mary, expecting a child under awkward circumstances, goes to visit her relative, Eliabeth, and records this prayer, which is heavily influenced by Hannah's prayer. Even though she, like Hannah, lived during difficult times, Mary discerned the hand of God-the work of the Holy Spirit-

in the midst of her life, though I'm sure the visit from the archangel Gabriel helped. She knew that there was something very unique to what God was doing in her life. Mary's experience of God was unique to her, but she also knew that God works in many people, and that brings us to the focus of our message this morning.

- Main Point: He is mighty and does great things for us too. Luke 1:49

Right in the middle of this unique statement reflecting her unique place in the plan of God, the Holy Spirit spoke through Mary and made a statement about God that is universal, experienced by people of every generation all over the world. The Spirit of God is mighty and He does great things.

mighty

The Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) is mighty. We get the word "dynamite" from the root of this word. The neuter form of the word is "possible" as in anything is possible. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus Himself said that "with God all things are possible." The basic idea, whether in connection with the Father, Son or Holy Spirit, "mighty" is the ability to accomplish whatever He wants to accomplish. We have limitations. He does not.

great things

It would be easy to think that this applies only to Mary. After all, she is the only person who can claim to be the mother of Christ. Her life is unique in that respect, but I propose the "great things" she mentions in this verse involves the Lord's plans for many, not just for one. The word refers to works that are notable and excellent and Luke adds that the same word can describe what the Lord has in mind for many, for His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation (next verse).

- Application: Verse 38 is perfect application. Pray this way, "Behold the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

- Conclusion

One of the ways discernment is practiced is in finding clarity and insight for the value of your own life and the works that you have done over the years for the cause of Christ. Mary realized this in discerning her own life. My prayer is that you discern this about your own life as well. The Lord does great things, but He does them for many, not just for one or a few.