

First Presbyterian Church
Luke 1:46-55, “Lectio Divina / Hope is Worth The Risk”
by Pastor Matt Johnson

If you're like me, your mind at this time of year is a beehive.
Thousands of little nudges, thoughts, to-dos, memories,
anxieties and feelings buzzing around.
Things I wish I had done differently wake me up at night.
It can be hard to hear the voice of God with all that buzzing going on.
With that in mind, today I have arranged our service
so that we can share together in an ancient Christian spiritual practice
specifically designed to calm the mind and create
space to hear from God.
The practice is known as *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for “Divine Reading.”

This practice was commonplace in monasteries by the time of St. Benedict
in the 6th Century, and has been used ever since –
even in protestant churches.
The idea is simple: A brief passage of Scripture is read aloud
while participants open themselves to be drawn by God
to a particular word or phrase in the text.
A time of silence and rest follows the reading.
The text is then read a second and third time,
with different questions guiding the time of silent reflection each time.
These readings will be interspersed throughout the service.

The goal is to marinate ourselves in Scripture,
to move beyond our analytical and critical ways of thinking,
allowing God's Word to resonate in our hearts.
Through *lectio divina* we encounter the Living Word (who is Christ)
within the written word and we carry that encounter with us
into the rest of our day.

Today's reading is known as the *Magnificat*: Mary's response to Elizabeth
after they have met and celebrated the miracle

which God has done in each of them –
and which God is bringing to the whole world.

One last note: each reading will be done through a different translation,
which enables us to hear the same text in new ways.

You may wish to open up your pew or phone bible to Luke 1:46-55
if a visual reference is helpful.

What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you?
Let us listen for God's word.

Luke 1:46-55, NRSV

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name;

⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

1:00 minute of silence

What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates to the reading?
Let us listen for God's word.

Luke 1:46-55, The Message

And Mary said,
I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

1:00 minute of silence

What is Christ's personal invitation to you from the Scripture?

Let us listen for God's word.

Luke 1:46-55, The Voice

Mary: My soul lifts up the Lord!

47 My spirit celebrates God, my Liberator!

48 For though I'm God's humble servant,

God has noticed me.

Now and forever,

I will be considered blessed by all generations.

49 For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

holy is God's name!

50 From generation to generation,

God's lovingkindness endures

for those who revere Him.

51 God's arm has accomplished mighty deeds.

The proud in mind and heart,

God has sent away in disarray.

52 The rulers from their high positions of power,

God has brought down low.

And those who were humble and lowly,

God has elevated with dignity.

53 The hungry—God has filled with fine food.

The rich—God has dismissed with nothing in their hands.

54 To Israel, God's servant,

God has given help,

55 As promised to our ancestors,

remembering Abraham and his descendants in mercy forever.

1:00 minute of silence

I wonder what you encountered in the reading and re-reading of this passage?
If we were in a small group, I would open up time for people to share
if they were willing.

I don't know what you heard, but something I hear in this text is hope.

Mary was living in time when the rich indulged themselves
at the expense of the poor, when kings who were not Jewish sat on thrones
in Jerusalem, when common people lived in fear
and scraped by as best they could.

But the world she describes flips all of this on its head.
Mary has hope that God will turn things upside down
so that it's the poor who have plenty,
and the people who live extravagant lives
wonder what happened to their empire of wealth.

God has done it before:

Remember the call of Abraham and Sara who had no children
The Lord promised that a great nation would emerge from them.
Remember David – who was just a forgotten shepherd boy at the time
when the Great King Saul was in power. But the Lord removed Saul,
who was proud and arrogant, and installed the humble David.

Mary's song suggests that something like that – or even bigger –
would happen again through the child in her womb.
She's so confident in this hope that she speaks
as though it were an accomplished fact.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann says that

“The hope articulated in ancient Israel is not a vague optimism
or a generic good idea about the future,
but a precise and concrete confidence in the future.”

And that is why hope is risky.

When we have concrete confidence in the future,
we risk adopting a Pollyanna perspective that everything will
turn out fine.

We risk settling for the status-quo “hoping” that
things will turn around eventually.

These are legitimate concerns about hope as we find it out in the world.

My counter is that hope in God, the kind that Mary had,
is worth the risk.

Hope is worth the risk,

because God’s vision for the world doesn’t allow us to
sit on our hands and accept the status quo.

Hope is worth the risk, because we serve a God
who knows the end from the beginning.

Our God is not impressed by rich people and powerful rulers.
Jesus came to inspire ordinary people in small towns
who knew they weren’t in charge.

As we read through Mary’s song today, in three translations,
with three different questions, did something stick out to you? [Pause]

Did you feel the Spirit alert you to a connection
in your own experience? [Pause]

Did you discern someplace where God is inviting you to participate
in what God is up to in the world? Will you respond to that invitation?

If so ... doesn’t that alone give you hope?

When we listen attentively to the Spirit of God through Lectio Divina,
we connect our hearts to God’s heart.

You can use this way of reading Scripture any time you like.

With all the things buzzing around my head, I need hope from God.

I need concrete confidence that God has a purpose for the world.

A purpose who was born among us as Jesus, the lamb of God.