

**Christmas Eve 2024**  
**Homily**  
**Rev. DC Fortune**  
**UU Congregation of the Susquehanna Valley**

In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, there is a passage depicting the interaction of Mary with her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with the baby that would become known as John the Baptizer. The women visited for some time before they were each due to give birth, both aware that their babies were destined for greatness and great tragedy. The role of prophets in that age was clear: they spoke truth to power, upset the rich, and were usually killed for their efforts. To be blessed by an angel of the Lord to carry a holy child was to understand that you were destined for heartbreak.

Mary understood her role in her time **and** understood that she would be remembered long after her bones had returned to the dust of the earth.

Mary got it. She knew, and understood, and accepted that her life was going to be painful in ways beyond measure. And she knew that it had to be done, and willingly accepted that role.

There is a passage in Luke called the Magnificat, and it is credited to Mary, described as a song. It goes like this:

**Mary's Song**

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”

(Luke 1:46-55 NIV)

The Lord’s mercy extends to those who fear him, she said, for “fear” was how the people of that day understood the notion of respect and obedience.

He has performed mighty deeds ... he has scattered those who are proud, she said.

He has brought down rulers and lifted up the humble.

He has fed the hungry until they were filled, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his people to remember to be merciful, just as he promised our ancestors.

Mary understood that her son would lead a revolution, and not one of swords or spears, but one that upended unjust systems: a revolution of morality and compassion.

Mary understood that a change was coming, and that her son, like the child of her cousin Elizabeth, would be instrumental in bringing that change into reality.

Unfortunately, both John and Jesus were early leaders of this revolution, and the life is often short for leaders of revolutions. The first ones who

cross the barrier to tear down the castle are always among the first to perish.

Revolutions, even revolutions of love, or kindness, or mercy, or compassion, or justice, well ... they are revolutions just the same, and are dangerous for revolutionaries. They understood what awaited their boys, and yet they obeyed their lord, and loved their sons, even when the world said they were crazy and dangerous.

The revolution would continue after the deaths of John the Baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, it continues to this day.

The message of Jesus Christ was clearly outlined in the gospels: be kind, and not just to those who love you, but to those who treat you badly as well. Reject the ego of self in favor of humble service. Feed the hungry, without asking for proof that they have exhausted all other options. They're hungry. Feed them.

Lift up the lowly that they may know what it is to be treated with dignity. Don't ask if they've got criminal records. Don't ask if they behave badly. Lift up all who suffer. All means all.

Those revolutionary ideas remain revolutionary, to this day. We debate about which persons deserve alms. Our systems deny relief to those deemed "unworthy" for one reason or another. We hedge when it comes to helping a beggar. Will they use my gift for drugs or for food?

I tell you, friends, that is not our business. If they are suffering, we are instructed to help, not interrogate.

We live in interesting times, as in the kind of interesting times associated with the ancient Chinese curse: may you live in interesting times.

Who can say whether the year ahead will be more or less weird, more or less unkind, more or less dangerous than any of thousands of years that have passed.

Our mission remains the same: feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. heal the sick, comfort the dying, visit the imprisoned. Do it because it is right and kind and just, not because you want accolades.

I remember someone ... I can't remember who it was ... from my childhood who told me that good deeds don't count unless we do them in secret. If someone finds out, it doesn't count.

I am not sure what sort of tally sheet we were keeping at the time – it may have been my childish understanding of how to accrue grace in order to outweigh sins – but whatever the reason, that lesson has stayed with me. Even today, when I do something for another, my human excitement wants to share that great feeling, but I know that drawing attention to my own virtue diminishes the act, so I try not to say anything. I don't always succeed, but I try.

Tonight, we will part company and disperse into the cold night. We will mark the holiday in any number of ways, and look to the new year that begins next week.

I encourage you to find peace amid the noise and bustle, to find love amid the stress, to find comfort if you are feeling alone. The new year will provide many opportunities for us to continue the love revolution begun by the son of a humble carpenter from Nazareth. Take this time to rest, rejuvenate, and renew. Our spiritual batteries will need to be fully charged in the year to come. Allow yourself time now to embrace the dark night, the turning of the earth, and know that the sun and its light will return as the work before us becomes clear.

May the blessings of Jesus' revolution of love be with you tonight and always.

Amen.