**Luke 1:46-55 Advent 4C 838**

Very soon you may be sitting around Christmas lunch with your families. On the surface in many a home everything looks rosy. There is good food and drink and maybe scattered members of your extended family are now together which may be rare. There is laughter and all appear happy. It may also be a delusion. Your deepest thoughts may be hidden and betray an arrogance of which none know except the all-seeing eye of God. So while you compliment mum for the meal you secretly think as you always have that she is a controller, overbearing, always making it clear that you are not and never have been what she expects you to be. You think dad is weak and ought to be more decisive and stand up for himself. You look at your sister and secretly think how stupid she looks in the clothes she wears and in the colouring of her hair. Your brother =- well , he could have married better and his children? They didn’t even wait for everybody else, but just started eating, for they have always been thoughtless and ill-mannered. Yes, you are so perfect. If only everybody else could be like you.

 It is against such a background of secret arrogance and selfrighteous despising of other people that we hear this morning’s text in Luke chapter 1. (Read)

We call it the Song of Mary. She is a young expectant mother and probably no more than 12-14 years of age. She is to be the mother of Jesus, which is the same name as Joshua, Isaiah, Hosea etc and means “saviour”. Its unlikely that she composed the song, but she makes it her own because it expresses her joy in the God who had called her.

For our purposes we pick up what it has to say against the arrogant. Here everything is reversed and turned upside down. It says that God has **scattered the proud……brought down the mighty, ……lifted up the humble….filled the hungry, but sent the rich away empty.** Boy, we need to hear this message. While we like the mighty in this world, the one with authority, the successful and the wealthy and the proud, our God has a special heart for the opposite. This is the knockout blow for the arrogant – for the family member who despises his relatives, for the teacher who thinks he or she is superior to other staff, for the pupil who despises the strugglers. Its quite typical. So we read in the NT:

“*Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were influential. God chose the foolish to shame the wise; God chose the weak to shame the strong. He chose the lowly and despised.”*

He does the same at Christmas as you know. He doesn’t choose a princess but, young Mary; not Rome, but tin-pot Bethlehem; not a cot in a specially prepared baby’s room, but a smelly feed trough ion a cattle shed; not admired by government leaders, but by roguish dishonest shepherds.

You don’t have to be too smart to draw conclusions for ourselves. Come down a peg and despise nobody . In the middle ages a wandering scholar took sick and was admitted to a hospital for orphans and the homeless. The doctors were discussing him in Latin unaware that he could understand them. They were suggesting that because he was homeless they might use him for medical experiments. He looked up and answered them in Latin “Call nobody worthless for whom Christ died.” Call nobody hopeless or worthless! That’s a way of life for the followers of the Christ. They are to have the new eyes with which to look out on people. Despise nobody, for God has not despised you. “for you was born in the city of david somebody special.” For you that somebody went to the cross.

1 more thing. The song about God scattering the proud and pulling down the mighty is the song of Mary. When the young girl took her child to the temple, the old man Simeon blessed the family, but then added to Mary “a sword will pierce your soul, Mary.” She would have to watch her son die. See, to be chosen by God is to be chosen not only for an easy happy path, but also for one that might require sweat and sometimes grief. A Spanish saint once prayed for his people: “May God deny you peace and give you glory.” And somebody else said: “ Jesus Christ didn’t come to make life easy, but to make people great.” I hope your year hasn’t been easy. But I hope you have been great!

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9/12/18 Hampstead centre

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