

Who Needs Jesus, Anyway? (Luke says WE do.)

Reconnect – December 20, 2009

Text: Luke 1:39-56, I John 4:9-11

Key Thought: We need Jesus to push us to love people we'd rather not.

Mary responded, "Oh, how I praise the Lord, How I rejoice in God my Saviour! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, And now generation after generation will call me blessed. For he, the Mighty One, is holy, And he has done great things for me. His mercy goes on from generation to generation, To all who fear him. His mighty arm does tremendous things! How he scatters the proud and haughty ones! He has taken princes from their thrones And exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things And sent the rich away with empty hands. And how he has helped his servant Israel! He has not forgotten his promise to be merciful. For he promised our ancestors – Abraham and his children – To be merciful to them forever."

Pre-Intro: Terry Tate

Intro: Split personalities

- I want to be two different people – sometimes, in my better moments, I want to be the person who loves everyone - and I try my best to be that person
- But other times, I wish I was Terry Tate – or at least that there was a Terry Tate at my disposal
- Confess – think about the people around you (maybe not at the moment ;) – isn't there someone that you've dreamed of just "dropping"? Just once?

Q: What holds us back from going "Terry Tate" on people?

- Laws? Social graces? Consequences? Delayed gratification? Sure – all of that and more
- Unfortunately, being "held back" is never a positive thing, really – think about all the different ways that phrase is used – less than your full strength or effort (holding something back), not being able to achieve what others do (being held back a grade), not getting your fair share of something (something being held back from you), lack of honesty, more
- So we teach our children to love people – to be kind, to help others – and we squirm when they hold us to the same standard we demand of them, just like they huff and puff when we point out their flaws
- And ultimately, judging by the state of the planet, humanity's best wishes and impulses don't seem to be enough to carry the day
- Conflict all around the globe – deep division between the wealthy and the poor (witness Copenhagen this past week) – plenty of greed to go around, and we try to keep a handle on the chaos at the same time we update our Facebook status
- How do we ever get out of this rat race? Or, "hamster race"? Of going in circles, like the Kia Soul commercial? How do we "drive into the light"?
- We need help – we need someone to come and show us the way, and that's what Advent is about
- Two weeks ago it was Matthew – "we need Jesus to show us how to live life alongside God"
- Last week it was Mark – "we need Jesus to help us make an impact on people"
- And now this week, it's Luke's turn – with the section of his book that gives us some of the background on Jesus' coming (**read/explain text**)

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- It's been six months since the old priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth had become pregnant, after a visit from an angel – they've been marvelling ever since
- And now Mary, Elizabeth's young relative (niece? Grand-niece?) has come to see her, because she's seen an angel too – she's also pregnant, and the angel told her that Elizabeth's pregnancy was proof that God was at work

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. What an honour this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me! When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice! You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

- Elizabeth's child will grow up to be John the Baptist, the one who would announce the coming of Jesus – and even inside her, he is already immersed in God's Spirit, and so is she
- In the natural, she has no idea that Mary is pregnant – it's only been a few days since the angel appeared to Mary, telling her that she would carry the Son of God
- But as God moves in, He speaks through her – prophesying – foretelling – that Mary is pregnant, too – with the Son of God ("the mother of my Lord")
- In the natural, the honour is Mary's – visiting someone more elderly, who has had this incredible miracle of pregnancy happen after years of praying for a child and being denied
- But again, for those who can see the truth of what's going on, the honour is Elizabeth's, because Mary is pregnant with Jesus, and is giving up everything she has to do it

**Mary responded, "Oh, how I praise the Lord, How I rejoice in God my Saviour!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
And now generation after generation will call me blessed.**

**For he, the Mighty One, is holy, And he has done great things for me.
His mercy goes on from generation to generation, To all who fear him.**

**His mighty arm does tremendous things! How he scatters the proud and haughty ones!
He has taken princes from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.
He has satisfied the hungry with good things And sent the rich away with empty hands.**

**And how he has helped his servant Israel!
He has not forgotten his promise to be merciful.
For he promised our ancestors – Abraham and his children – To be merciful to them forever."**

- In response, Mary sings – again, God is speaking through her – it's not just a happy song, or a song honouring God – it's a song that foretells what God is going to do – it's foreshadowing for the entire book of Luke

- In Catholic circles, they call this song *The Magnificat* – Latin for “glorifies”, the first word
- The theme of the song is God’s work extending through all times – all generations of people – the past, the present and the future
- And it’s about **reversals** – then and now, the world respects, worships wealth, fame, power, in all of their forms, from eternal youth to being desired to being in control
- But God is in the reversal business – he turns things upside down again and again, generation after generation
 - Exalting the lowly
 - Satisfying the hungry
 - Sending away the wealthy
 - Bringing down the proud
- He does it because, she sings, of his mercy – his compassion on people like you and me, people of the earth, people that he created
- People like you and I that are flawed, that put other people on pedestals, people like us that wish for what we can’t have and let what we can’t have poison what we do have
- She sings that God doesn’t forget his promises – and that when things are darkest and hardest and look the worst, that help is on the way
- No wonder it’s a song that is still being sung today, still inspiring people even now

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

- Right about the time Elizabeth is ready to give birth, Mary goes home – and now she’s showing that she’s pregnant – and tongues are going to wag – where did this happen – here or there? Where was she, and what was she doing there, anyway? And why did she leave in such a hurry in the first place?

We love reversals:

- There’s something about us as people, we just love reversals
 - We love it when the underdog wins – the great rags to riches stories, people who came from nothing
 - We watch the talent competitions, looking for that person who is going to make it big
 - But then ironically, we’re watching to see if and when they will FALL from grace, too
- Think about the feeding frenzy surrounding Tiger Woods – here was a person who inspired a whole generation to golfing, whose face sold countless products, who was a model of control
- Yeah, there were people who thought he was arrogant – but more and more, people were getting behind someone who was a living legend – how much could he win? How far could he go? How many records could he break?
- And now that the hidden parts of his life have been revealed, we’re still hanging on every word that the media is delighting to bring us
- There’s blood in the water – a reversal is underway, and don’t we just love it
- At least, we love being spectators – it’s a little tougher when you’re either being oppressed and praying for help, or even the person who is on top, feeling the earth shake a bit

Jesus and expectations:

- When people thought about the one who God had promised to send, the one who was going to bring about reversals, it made them feel really good – like their hockey team was finally going to win the Cup, after years of being the league joke – or like they were finally going to get that promotion that never seemed to go their way
- But then Jesus came, and expectations were turned on their heads again
- Yes, he brought reversals – but he didn't do it through overturning the world – he did it through loving people and showing compassion to those who were on the underside – further gone

“At least I'm not them”:

- The pecking order is something we learn early on in school, and it stays with us – there is an order to our society – there are people who are above and below, and we find our place and ground our identity there, wherever “there” happens to be
- III. – at Children's Aid – “they must be adoptive parents” – the “guess who these people are” game – all about the outside, extremely shallow – but that's the way we are
- But Jesus had no time or patience for that – time and again, Luke has him helping people that you wouldn't have expected had you been there – Romans – the dirt poor – the unclean – the possessed – the sick – the foreigners – women – criminals
- He is engineering reversals, but none of the right ones! When does the conquest start? When do we get to be in charge again? When do we get our own pedestals?
- But Jesus refuses to get sucked into the world's way of doing business
- His sense of right and wrong, the JUSTICE that He brings, is God's, not ours (thank goodness)
- His compassion, his mercy, his “umbrella of protection” is much larger than ours would ever be – and that can be disconcerting no matter how much or little we know Him

Pushed towards compassion:

- Jesus is not satisfied with our status quo and our pecking orders, and our complacent acceptance of the way our lives tend to run week after week
- He's not content with us having a Terry Tate list, or being on a hamster wheel and going nowhere
- But his brand of radical compassion is always stretching, always uncomfortable, always new and a bit scary – especially, maybe, in our comfy suburban lives
- Sometimes we just don't want to help the people around us – we can't stand them, they frustrate us, we have our own problems and who is there for us?
- But that's where Jesus pushes – he's not satisfied having people on the bench, and he will keep kicking us in the butt until we get out there
- And we feel that push – **(talk about the great work being done by the ministries we support – CCM, Nadine, Food Bank, Kathy Bowler)**
- But giving a cheque is not enough – trip to CCM with Mark – but it can't be just “out there” either – it starts in the next row of chairs, the next house over, the desk across from us

Key Thought:

We need Jesus to push us to love people we'd rather not.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. (1 John 4:9-11, NLT)

Conclusion: The Church is God's choice

- Our reluctance can come out of a "who am I" syndrome – should I be the one to show this kind of love? Isn't there anyone else to do it?

Regardless of how you view the church, it is a critical part of God's divine strategy to demonstrate his redemptive story to the world. The really good news is that we are the church – you and I together *are* the church. It's amazing when you think about it! If people looking in from the outside really knew your story or my story, they'd probably question how we got this role. And if you knew me the way I know me, or if I knew you the way you know you, I suspect we would disqualify each other. Even so, God has chosen us in spite of our messiness or maybe even because of it. All along He has planned this thing called the church so we could send a collective message to a generation that needs to know Him. Life is messy, but even with all our faults and failures you and I are still given a chance to demonstrate the message of His love. We are in this together only because God put us together to show how much He cares for our broken world. Somehow God is going to use you and me collectively to be the church. That's his plan, and only God could have thought of it.

Reggie Joiner, Think Orange: Imagine The Impact When Church And Family Collide..., p.36-37

- **Who is He pushing us to love? To reach out to?**
- **What needs to be overturned or upended in our lives?**

Response: Prayer, Q & A