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Sirach 10:12-18  
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## Sing on Mary!

It takes a lot of guts to say the words, “God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.”

Challenging the powerful and speaking truth to power is not easy. But, if that is so, I wonder why I constantly get put into situations where I’m part of a group that does this. At Goshen College, there was an argument about hiring gay professors. At Duke, it was about racism against African American students. Now in our denomination is the question of repentance and transformation for how Mennonite churches have denied the gifts of gay Christians and clergy.

Yes, some of those powerful people were proud; they talked about how much money they had hostage if only people would be silent and let them have their way on a particular issue. No, really, someone actually listed an amount of money they would not give to Mennonite Church USA if the repentance and transformation resolution passed.

And who was crying out for a change? I have seen that these protests are done by the lowly and for the lowly. I’m not saying that students at private colleges and universities are lowly in the context of the world but lowly within the context of their college institution. Huh. what Mary says really is revolutionary. God has brought down the administrators and the donors and lifted up the students.

But let’s take a break from the present to talk about Mary. Mary was the lowest of the low. She was a member of a conquered nation, an unmarried young woman who was going to have a baby. Honestly, in a Bible with so many unnamed women, we are lucky that the scriptures even remember her name. It is astounding that earlier in Luke, Zechariah, a priest at the pinnacle of his career, is silenced by God, but Mary sings for 9 verses! Mary sings about the character of God. Someone who looks with favor at the lowly. She shows mercy to her people and brings down the powerful. He remembers his promises to Isreal.

As I read this text, I cannot help but think about this as a pronouncement that God will bring down King Herod, Pontious Pilot, and Ceaser from their thrones. That God will bring food to fishermen and peasants and send the rich young ruler way. That God will fulfill a promise of prophetic fire on the nations that are enemies of Isreal. God has brought Ceaser down from his throne and lifted up the peasants.

And now, I've got the parody song Well-Armed Peasants stuck in my head. "thou art overtaxing well-armed peasants, bring a pitchfork and a torch for we're well-armed peasants." However, we know that Jesus does not lead a violent revolution, so why include Mary's song in the good news about Jesus?

Perhaps Sirach can offer us some clues.

Sirach is a wisdom book written about 200 years before Christ. The book introduces itself as something people who love learning could use to live according to the Law and the Prophets. This book is considered canon by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. But it is not universally accepted by all Jews. Ironically, maybe because of how much the early Christian church embraced it. But for us today, It is enough to say I believe that Mary is quoting Sirach. "The lord overthrew the thrones of rulers and enthroned the lowly in their place."

Sirach gives a whole chapter talking about rulers. "A wise magistrate educates his people, and the rule of an intelligent person is well ordered, but an undisciplined king ruins his people." So Sirach is not against rulers in general but against foolish leadership. Moreover, people should not honor foolish leaders or those who break the commandments.

So... if Mary is quoting the parts of Sirach that are saying how God will punish prideful and foolish rulers... then... Mary is saying God will bring down rulers and calling her rulers foolish and proud.

Mary calls King Herod and Ceaser foolish and proud. That takes guts! Granted, she has Christ in her womb, but I'll still give Mary most of the credit. So what kind of guts do we have today to be like Mary?

As we think about what it means to welcome Christ's restoration this Advent. I need to be thinking about the Marys in our communities crying out for a different sort of world. From the desire to have our worship available online, the difficulty people have getting over curbs, up ramps, and through doors, people saying this church ought to be welcoming and affirming to gay folks. I've spent these three years trying my best to listen to people, understand people, and be a preacher of action and not empty words. Today, this text tells me to continue listening deeper.

And some of us are Marys in this church. Singing a song of freedom inspired by the Holy Spirit. Calling out the foolishness of power in our church, nation, and world. Working for peace and justice. We need the voice of Mary to continue to sing that revolutionary song. To call for wisdom and that God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted the lowly.