

"Fragments of Love" Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126, Luke 1:46-55

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So, what do you want for Christmas?

Have you noticed this question being asked a lot in the last few weeks? It's probably the most asked question in December. Second only to the question we'll hear next week: "What'd you get for Christmas?"

Little kids are asked that question as they climb into Santa's lap at the mall. Relatives as us as they are preparing to shop for gifts. We ask our friends when we are trying to find just the right present to express our love and appreciation for them.

What do you want?

Our answer may be superficial: a new shirt, or a membership to the gym, or my two front teeth. Or we may think big when we answer: I want world peace, or healthcare for all, or I want the healing of our planet. Maybe we can't quite put our finger on it, what it is that we most long for at this moment in our lives.

If Advent is a season of waiting, then what is it that you are waiting for? What do you want? Go deep, go to the bedrock of your deepest yearnings of your heart when you answer.

I find myself asking this question of everyone in the gospel narratives of Jesus' birth. Shepherds, what did you want? Joseph? The angels? The wise men? The Innkeeper?

What was it you wanted at this moment in your lives?
Elizabeth? Zachariah? Simeon and Anna? What were you
looking for? Mary, what did you want?

Somehow, as Mary proclaims the words of the Magnificat, it seems that she is answering that question of what she wanted for more than just . In her song I hear the longing and desires of all the women of Jesus' ancestral line coming through in Mary's proclamation. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus mentions four women who came before Mary: Tamar. Rahab. Ruth. And Bathsheba, King David's wife, who is not mentioned by name but only referred to as the mother of Solomon, former wife of Uriah. Each of these women had a story of how they faced powerlessness with creativity, craftiness, and the will to not only survive but to flourish. And each of them wanted something from God.

Tamar, was denied the social safety net when her husband died, and then she married his brother as was the custom, and he died. Her father-in-law didn't keep his promise to see that she was married to another of his heirs. Wily Tamar turned the tables on her father-in-law (a long story there) and managed to secure what she needed. Tamar wanted to know she was not abandoned.

Rahab, known also as "the harlot" hid the Israelite spies on the roof of her brothel and gained their promise to save her and her family when the city was defeated. Rahab wanted to know that her life could be used for a greater purpose.

Ruth was an outsider, a foreigner, whose language and religion defined her as "other" and "outsider." Yet after Ruth's husband died, she devotedly followed her mother-in-law

back to Bethlehem, where this immigrant would marry Boaz and give birth to King David's grandfather. Ruth wanted to know that she belonged.

And **Bathsheba**, denied even a name in this narrative, whose fate was at the mercy of a King who simply took what he wanted because he could. She who had no power or agency or identity in this story gave birth to, raised and guided the formation of Solomon, known for his great wisdom. Bathsheba wanted to know that she wasn't an object or a pawn, but a woman whose love could shape the world.

Mary, an unmarried, pregnant teenager, with no power or agency or position in the world, sings of God's subversive power. She sings a song that is not only for herself but for all of these women.

"For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation. God has shown strength with God's arm; God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

What did these outsider, powerless women want in God's great story of grace and redemption? They wanted belonging, connection, meaning...they wanted to not just survive but to be birthers of life and possibility. *They wanted to know that they mattered to God.*

Even though Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba didn't have credibility, power, position, or much else to commend

them, they all had great heart and courage. What did they want? They wanted to matter to God. They wanted to be a part of the Great Story of love, which is the essence of the Christmas message: the world is God's beloved.

What do you want for Christmas?

Perhaps we need to turn to the poets to name that unnamable yearning we all carry within us. At the end of his life, when he was dying of lung cancer at 50 years old, the poet Raymond Carver answered this question of what he had wanted most in his life. The poem, "Late Fragment," appears in his last book of poems and is carved on his gravestone. It goes like this:

*And did you get what
You wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
Beloved on the earth.*

Leave it to the poets to answer the question so perfectly. What do you want for Christmas? What do you really want? "To call ourselves beloved, to feel ourselves beloved on the earth."

And God so loved the world, that God gave us - each of us, every one of us- exactly what we wanted for Christmas. God's gift catalogue is limited to one thing, we all get the same thing: to call ourselves beloved. It's the gift we're all waiting for this Advent.

Amen.