



“REALITY SHIFT”
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1: 39-55
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
December 19, 2021, Hybrid Worship
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

Luke 1:39-55

1:39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,

1:40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

1:41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

1:42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

1:43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

1:44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

1:45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

1:46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,

1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

1:48 for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of a servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

1:49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name.

1:50 God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation.

1:51 God has shown strength with their arm; God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

1:52 She has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

1:53 God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

1:54 God has helped their servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy,

1:55 according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

What are the first words you remember hearing about your body? Transport yourself back to that small child that you were—that little animal still lives inside of you—open, listening, soaking in reality like a new sponge. Everything sinks in deep.

Imagine where that little earnest one lives inside you still, re-remembering those first words. Or maybe the words have faded, but the feelings, the sensations, they are still in-forming how your body lives and breathes.

Once our imagination opens to that innocent little one inside of us, who needs love, who needs safety, who needs nourishment and care we are able to be present for and with ourselves with more wisdom, with more compassion, with more love.

No matter your experience, there is deep formation there—that we carry in our cells—the feelings of connection and disconnection, the feelings of solace and fear, the feelings of rest, the feelings of vigilance, dissonance, the feelings of balance.

Extend gentleness to that little one inside of you. That little one needs you to be gentle with them.

(Hold silence)

Now let your imagination travel some more to where you heard words about how your body has been told to conform or to change. In varying degrees, all of our bodies have been told we're not what we should be. There is a brutality in those discoveries—when you are told your body really isn't your own or that it isn't what it should be.

Some of us have ready access to that space within us—where we learned to disappear, to disconnect, to get smaller, to get quieter, to be someone we are not. Some of us have buried that part of us, quieted them for so long, that we can barely remember the sound of their voice.

Those words of shame and conformity, those sensations of judgment and blame can make us lose track of the little one inside of us—the one who just wants to stretch out and be, who just wants to be loved and embraced.

Offer gentleness into that deep place of loss of innocence inside you—wherever it is, gentleness. Soft, safe, soothing.

(hold silence)

Long ago and far away, a young woman—probably 12 or 13 years old, was learning these things about herself—that her body was not her own, that she was shedding any innocence she may have had, that she was not safe in this world, that her choices were few.

Long ago and far away, a young woman—was carrying so many new sensations—many lost in time to us, many erased by the church fathers who needed this young woman’s body to prop up their denigration of female bodies and their shaming and blaming of human sexuality.

Mary’s power got co-opted by the powers and principalities—she’s been used to make us compliant to false gods, not the God of liberation. Mary was defiant of the false gods. She was compliant with the God of liberation. Her power is revolutionary—she is a co-conspirator with a God who never tires of toppling empires, who never tires in dissolving the idols of dominance and supremacy, the God who never tires of birthing new ways to get people free.

Many of those sensations Mary felt are lost to us, but so alive in Mary—she knew the razor’s edge she now found herself on—she knew because her body knew what transpired to get her to that place where her feet carry her outside of town to see a woman, her elder, who might understand, who could sit with her in this reality shift that she could not escape.

Both of their bodies (the young woman and the elder) were captive to this new reality, gestating, expanding, emerging. Cells were multiplying, ligaments stretching in each pelvis, breasts swollen and tender, skin bearing the marks of growing.

Giving birth was and is a liminal space between life and death. And for both of these women there were layers of reality that made their expanding bellies both mystifying and terrifying, inspiring and sobering.

Breathe and let yourself be present to the mystifying and terrifying, inspiring and sobering realities your bodies and our bodies are holding these days. We are all absorbing the impact and current of these intense times we live in. We are all metabolizing a dizzying array of unknowns. We live in the liminality of life and death. We are all, somewhere inside of us, bracing for what is next, what could be happening to us, through us, without our consent.

Extend some gentleness there—into your vulnerability. We’ve been told so many stories about this part of us—our vulnerability. We’ve been told good things and bad things, brutal things and tender things. We’ve been told cruel things and healing things. Right now—extend some gentleness there.

You don't have to do anything right now but be good to yourself.

That’s what Mary was doing when she went to be with Elizabeth. A place where she could find her equilibrium point—the still point, the place where there is holiness in each of us, the place where the Divine lives—we use words like spirit and soul and heart to talk about that place within each of us—but it’s mysterious really—it may not be a place at all, but a capacity, a condition of possibility, an energy source, a balancing disposition that brings us back to our belovedness, our capacity for thriving and zest—our capacity for fidelity to who God made us to be—who God dreamed we could be.

Mary sings to us about that place in her body where she will go during the labor pains—the place she surrenders to, the capacity that she trusts to deliver her, to deliver God into the world anew.

Mary sings to us and through us about the crumbling of empire and the birth of a world finally at peace with itself.

Two of our siblings have a song to sing to us. Janice Kominiski wrote this song. And Andrea Rosal is accompanying her.

Listen for words and phrases that resonate with you. This song is an invitation to be here together in the shifting reality we are experiencing, in the crumbling of empire, in the new world we are trying to imagine.

We will listen to this song and then hold silence.

Then we will spend just a few moments savoring the blessing together.

Play video of Janice and Andrea

(will follow the song with some quiet)

Thank you, Janice and Andrea, for singing to us about being limber in these tumultuous times.

Micah is going to slowly scroll through the lyrics while we savor these words about our bodies, about God's movement in the world.

Don't worry if you can't see them very well or read every word. Remember they just washed over you as a song about freedom. We'll pause a few times and see what comes up.

(scroll through lyrics on the screen—not too fast; split screen for online and full screen for sanctuary)

VERSE ONE

**It's been a long year
With so many changes (Ha! Who're we kidding?)
It's been almost two
With life rearranging.
Nothing stays the same, a
Constant adjustment
Carrying our pain, we
Hide it not trusting—we fear
If I let some out
Will I breach the levies? -and
If I lose control
Will I drown in swirling
seas?**

VERSE TWO

**Each crisis lays bare
All of the others
Each choice that we make
Impacts another
Dare we take a peek
behind the curtain?
Dare we diagnose
the source of the hurting?
But, what if I find,
I'm not who I want to be?
And, what will it cost
If I should truly see?**

CHORUS ONE

**(Oh) I'm scared to Bend
I fear I'll Break
Too tired to Bend
How much can I take?**

(pause lyrics scrolling)

(MMS asks a question for people to wonder about silently. What is hard about bending?)

(keep scrolling through the lyrics)

VERSE THREE

**At some point we find
This isn't working
No dose of denial
Can make it alright.
We try to look away, but
We can't unsee it.
Summoning our strength, we
seek to relieve it.
It's not just the situation that needs to change
It's my orientation that needs to rearrange.
I've gotta move forward, I can't go back
With trepidation I choose a path**

CHORUS TWO

**(Oh) It's time to bend
But what if I break?
I need to bend...
There's no other way
There's no other way**

BRIDGE

**And so I pray
God please don't let me break, and s/he says
"Chi-ild, who told you
all breaking was bad?
By now you know:
it's not simple as that!
What about -- break through, break open
Make space for me?
More of me, in you, don't you know -- that's how the
world gets free?" Ohhh,**

CHORUS THREE

**"But you got to bend...
That's what it will take.
It's your time to bend
To be fully awake."**

(pause scrolling)

(MMS ask a question for silent reflection: Where is God making space within you?)

Put final lyrics on the screen and hold them there.

CODA

**"Bend to break open -- bend to break through
Bend to allow me to work through you"
...Bend...
Stiff-necked people,
Can't bring about peace. ("no...")
Lim-ber people,
are what the world needs.**

**You got to Bend
To break
Free...**

Leave the final lyrics up

What words are soaking in for you today?

You can say those aloud, share them in the chat.

(MMS will repeat what people share in the sanctuary. RRC will read the chat)

We have liberating power when we find ways to be faithful together, when we find ways to believe impossible things together, when we find our way to siblings who believe, too..

Dip down in that that deep place where you were dreamed up by the primal Creator—the poet of the world, the miracle maker—the one who made us to be free, and stirs our appetites for a better world, the one who tells us when to rest and when to breathe and when to push and when to trust and when to protect and how to connect.

Breathe and let yourself be present to the mystifying and terrifying, inspiring and sobering realities your bodies and our bodies are gestating these days.

Let that liberation song sink in. Let it befriend that part of you that is ready for something new to be born.

Thanks be to God.