

Magnify
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The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Luke 1:39-56

[Pull out magnifying glass] Have you ever noticed that with a magnifying glass you need to either hold it close or far away for an object to come into focus?

And not all of us have the same visual acuity...some people see really well up close, and people my age, we tend to want to extend our arms so things are clearer.

Magnificat simply means "magnifies," and it refers to Mary's declaration that her soul magnifies the Lord. Think about that image for a moment: a magnifying glass that makes God even larger in our field of vision.

Human beings carry different magnifying glasses that enable us to pull God into view.

For some of us, the lens is nature.

For others, it is in serving people and working for justice and peace in our world.

For some, it is spending time in contemplation and prayer.

For others, the connections of friendship and hospitality provide the best view of God.

What is the lens that magnifies God for you? How do you catch a glimpse of the sacred?

I'm aware that sometimes we have trouble bringing the Holy into focus. Our nation is in a time of deep anxiety, and it is more important than ever to keep the sacred in view.

Sometimes we get caught up looking to often through the lens of fear. It is compelling. And we are convinced that to put up defenses is the only way to stay safe, to protect "our own."

And the truth is, we are easily swayed by fear. There was this moment the other night... I was reading to our foster daughter, it's part of our little nighttime routine. Suddenly, she leapt out of bed screaming and ran out into the kitchen. She had noticed in the corner of the ceiling

that there was a Daddy Long Legs. I tried explaining that insects are a part of nature, and that it was cold outside, and maybe the little guy just needed a warm spot. She wouldn't return until Clark came in and removed it, squashing it with a napkin.

Maybe some of you can relate to her sense of dread. I tried to help her understand that I couldn't be certain there were no more spiders, but that I hoped it was the case.

Tyranny happens in many forms. For some, it's creepy crawlies. For others it is the almighty dollar, perfectionism, upward mobility. For some it is the tyranny of an abusive spouse, an unforgiving relationship, the rejection of family. For others, it is an addiction which attempts to numb the fear.

We try to fight back against the tyranny by staying connected to our Source, but when we are busy with careers or raising children and we're not able to get away to the mountains (if that is our magnifying glass), it can be unsettling. Or if we have an illness that prevents us from social contact (if that is our lens), our connection to God feels elusive.

[Bring out binoculars] Maybe, from time to time, we need to adjust the focus or even try switching to a new lens. Not everybody sees the Holy the same way. Perhaps trying out a different way to see God would be a useful exercise. If you find God only in solitary moments, perhaps singing together in church or engaging someone at coffee hour or teaching Sunday school would open a new vista for you.

Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps someone sees God through you and your life? What I'm saying is, that there is a spark of the divine mixed in with all our human foibles and shortcomings. So even if you're not perfect, you still have the opportunity to awaken the Spirit within another person. You might act as a lens through which someone can catch a glimpse of God!

Sometimes, at this time of the year when the nights are longest and the daylight is brief, we need to work a little harder to find that bright spark. And then we need to find tinder and blow on the spark so that it grows brighter and shines all around.

By anyone's standards, Mary was a "nobody." Just another sweet hearted Judean peasant girl living in a backwater of the Roman

Empire. She herself says that God “looks with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” So, how might God be looking at us this morning? How might God be looking at you? If God could favor Mary with being the bearer of Christ, why couldn’t God regard us similarly?

Meister Eckhart, the great 14th century mystic, wrote, *“We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us.”*

So, what can we do to be the bearers of Christ? What can we do to carry Christ within us and help him to be reborn not just 2,000 years ago in a faraway land, but here, now, again and again?

We don’t know very much about Mary, neither from the gospel record, nor from first-hand historical accounts. But one of the things we must certainly realize about this woman from the child she bore and raised is that she must have been extraordinary. If Jesus reflected something of Mary, it may have been her faith and compassion. Whether you take the birth narratives literally or figuratively, Jesus definitely had some of Mary’s DNA and she had the opportunity to nurture and shape the boy who would become the messiah. In other words, her soul magnified God.

So, I was thinking about this: what is it that my soul magnifies? What is it that the core of my being as well as my daily activities amplifies and projects? Does my soul magnify God, or does it magnify my own needs and wants? Can someone ever see a reflection of the divine through something I do, or is it all so much “other stuff” that the Christ-light is obscured?

What does your soul magnify in the ways you spend your time, and exert your power and influence? What does your soul magnify in your interactions with others? What does your soul magnify in what you pray about or for?

I imagine that when neighbors came through St. George's doors on Monday night, they got to glimpse the sacred in the faces of the volunteers who fed them. Likewise, they radiated God's love in their greetings and thanks – one of them was reported to say "*As children of God...we are instruments...intended to be instrumental.*"

Every time an ill or homebound parishioner receives a card, or a visit from Jane or Sheldon or Jackie or soup from Kim or chocolates from Trees, I imagine that the lens through which they experience God's love takes on a very human form.

Here's the thing... we all have that capacity.

What would the world be like if all of us allowed our lives to magnify the Lord – in greater or lesser ways, in simple acts or in mighty ones? What if we all acted, every day, in all that we said and did, through a lens of grace and faithfulness and compassion?

We may not read about it on Facebook or see it in too many headlines, but the world is populated by people who intentionally bring God into clearer view through prayer, action, compassion, investment, service, and helping others to find access to the sacred. It is almost as if there is an invisible line of people standing by to help others see the divine more sharply.

We have some hindsight about Mary's story and we know what ends up being true: death does not have the last word. It will take some time to bring Caesar down and the Caesars of the world keep cropping up. But what we see in the overarching meta-narrative of humanity and our faith is that love and life, joy and hope, peace and light, calm and bright are more powerful truths, more mighty, than the tyranny of fear.

Because of this, we choose to live with love as our guiding star. And that star leads us to each other... to listen to God's cry in the silent night, to get out of our trenches and then to repair and build up God's reign. May it be so, dear friends, and may it be soon. Amen.