

Preacher: The Rev'd Robert Hay

Place: Grovely Parish

Date: 23 and 24th December 2018

Advent 4

Readings: Luke 1. 39 -55

Text:

For God has looked with favour upon his lowly servant.

Luke 1.48.

ST MARY AND THE HOBBITS

My text comes from today's gospel reading – the Song of Mary or as it is often called the Magnificate. Before I look at Mary and her Song of change, I would like to say something about a book, which you may have read or you may have seen the moves based on the books. I want to say something about J R Tolkien's famous work, "The Lord of the Rings".

In Tolkien's literary masterpiece, the story reaches its climax with a great battle between the forces of evil Sauron, and the combined forces of Men, Elves and Dwarfs assisted by the wizard, Gandalf. The battle of the Mighty Ones is happening. Then all eyes turn to the south, for something is also happening there. A moment of change is happening. In the south, in the Land of Mordor, the land ruled by Sauron, two weak and exhausted hobbits have done something beyond everyone's expectations. To those not familiar with Tolkien's books, the hobbits are a smallish people, who have big feet, who live in a place called, "The Shire." They are a rather innocent group of people. These two hobbits have just completed a most dangerous journey. They have carried the Ring of Power, which is Sauron's ring, to its destruction in the fires of the Mount of Doom. In this time of silence on the battlefield, all are looking

to the south. Then the land of Mordor begins to explode, and crash in upon it self. The time of Sauron, and the land of Mordor, has come to an end. The two, small, insignificant hobbits have done a great thing. They have changed their world. A great good was done.

Tolkien's work is a work of fiction and of fantasy. It is an adventure story about the triumph of good over evil. There is a sense however that Tolkien; a man of strong Christian faith has woven into his story, one of the underlining themes the gospels. He has taken the theme of the world being changed by the most unlikely of persons. The agents of change are not the mighty and the great. The agents of change are the insignificant and the ordinary.

Like the Tolkien sage, the gospels accounts tell us of change happening through the faithfulness and perseverance of ordinary people, often the most unlikely of people.

On this Sunday, our eyes are turning to one of these unlikely people chosen by God - a young woman called Mary. There is indeed a Tolkien like quality about Mary. Just as the two hobbits in Tolkien's story made the greatest change in his story, so Mary, in the gospels, is an agent of major change, in her own way.

In many ways, Mary is a mystery person. We know little about her. I think that is part of her charm, and attractiveness. God has an extraordinary capacity to choose the most unlikely of people to do his work. God chose for example, a little known group of people, called the Hebrews, whom he would shape and guide, when he established a covenant with them.

Likewise, the story of the New Testament is the story of the unlikely ones, being the chosen ones. God chose for example a simple, young woman called Mary, and a carpenter called Joseph to be the agents of bringing Christ Jesus into the world. Similarly, Jesus chose provincial, poorly educated, fishermen to be the founders of his church. Then the Resurrection Jesus should chose a persecutor of the early church to be one of the most important evangelists of the gospel.

In fact God seems to have a bias towards - the ordinary person, and - the everyday situation to do his work.

The quality, which all these unlikely persons have in common, is a willingness to say Yes to God. Yes, says Mary, I will do what you ask, and carry the Christ child. Yes, says Joseph the carpenter, I will look after Mary, my betroved, and the child she is carrying. Yes, I will follow you, and be your disciple says the fisherman, and the tax collector, and the zealot, and the Pharisee. It is this yes: this willingness to accept the new opportunities, as well as the challenges and difficulties, that following this calling will bring, which unites all these unlikely people. They allowed themselves to be used by God.

The yes of Mary is indeed a very powerful and world changing yes. Mary's song, which she proclaimed at her meeting with Elizabeth, her cousin, is a vision of a new world. It seems at first an innocent song: this song sung by a young woman. Yet, it is a song of upheaval and change. It is a song about a world, where the powerful are brought low, and the lowly are lifted up; where the hungry are filled with good things, and the rich are sent away empty handed, where mercy is show to those who fear the Lord. It is a song about a new world order, which looks to the coming of the Kingdom of God. It looks to the birth of Jesus.

This Sunday our eyes are beginning to turn to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, which we will be celebrating on Tuesday. As we move from Advent to Christmas, it seems an appropriate time to stop a moment, and to give ourselves time to ponder and think. In the light of the call of Mary and the call of the disciples, and of others, it seems an appropriate time to consider the call that God may be making on our lives. The question to ponder is: how can ordinary human beings like you and me, be used by God? What is God asking each of us to do, at this time, and in this place?

To this reflective question there is no quick answer. It is a question to ponder on. What's more, the answer to that question would be different for each of us.

But remember the Hobbits in Tolkien's story, and remember Mary and Joseph, and the fishermen Peter, James and John, and the Pharisee Saul, and so many other people. God does use the most unlikely of persons to do his work, and God uses the most unlikely of places to do his work in.

To that question about being used by God, often all God requires of us is a Yes. Yes, Lord I am here; use me.

What that work, which God is asking us to do, is as different as each of us is different. It may be as simple as smiling at someone, or praying for someone, or talking to someone, or helping someone, or even perhaps helping and caring for your self. For you too are important to God and God wants to care for you as well as others. What we need to remember is that God uses the most unlikely people, and the most unlikely of situations to do his work in this world.

So on this Sunday, remember Mary, who had this vision of a new reality, a reality that the child, which she is carrying, would bring into being. Mary, the unlikely one, living in an unlikely place, is the one who proclaimed in her song: “God has looked with favour upon this his lowly servant. And great things he has done.”

Let us prayer

Lord, you used a little known woman to bring great change. You used little known fishermen to help found your church. You used someone, who was hostile to your gospel, to build up your church.

Help each of us to be open to you, and to be used by you for your holy and good purposes. Amen

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