

**Breaking Into Song**, October 18, 2020, St. Timothy, Burnaby  
1 Samuel 1.9-11, 19-20; 2.1-10; Luke 1.46-55

*Prayer*

It's happened to all of us at one time or another.

We've settled down in front of the TV. The snacks and the drinks are within reach. The blanket just perfectly covers over the ends of our toes. We're just starting to get to know the characters of the story and we think we might even like them when *suddenly*...the music of the soundtrack gets a little louder. The character on screen makes a little jerk with their head as though they can *hear* the soundtrack. Then they twirl around and start *singing*?! WAIT A MINUTE! Is THIS a *MUSICAL*?!!

Oh no! How did I get tricked into watching a musical? How could I not have known!

They're so terrible, these musicals. People walking around and singing as if it's part of their everyday lives. As if this is how people communicate with one another.

Nobody is really like that. Nobody actually does that. Who is *that* happy?

And that's where we've found ourselves in church this morning. We started off with a nice story about a woman crying in tears because God wouldn't let her have a baby. Then she prays and gives birth and suddenly *she's singing*. And our gospel jumps right into *the singing* too. We barely get to hear any of Mary's story before she's singing all over the place. Even the canticle which we recited is Zechariah's song—it's the all-musical Sunday today, apparently. (But we're still not allowed to sing.)

But what brings these happy songs together is *not* that everything is sunshine lollipops and rainbows. All three of these characters are happy—but they're happy because of what God has done for them—how God has reversed their fortunes. God has turned things around for them. And the songs from our readings acknowledge God's ability to completely change things for all kinds of people—rich made poor, hungry made full, the poor raised up from the dust heap and the powerful brought down from their thrones. God has taken the things that were bad in their worlds and made them better. And God has also reversed the fortunes of those who were happy and rich and well-fed.

...so...if I can't get into the happy mood of the songs in this musical...

If I'm *unhappy* about the way that things have been turned around...

Is God calling me to account? Is all of this: COVID; isolation; loneliness; lack of human contact; is this all part of God's plan? Has *someone* been brought up through all of this? Am I one of the proud being brought down? The rich being made poor? Is God bringing me down to *Sheol*?

...or, and please tell me it's this option....

Am I still waiting for God to do one of those reversals in my life? Is that still to come for me?

I don't know about you, but I can't remember the last time I felt like breaking into song in the middle of my day. It certainly wasn't in 2020. And I suspect that many of us are feeling that way today. Not eager to jump up and sing for joy. Not bursting with exuberance.

But perhaps we can imagine what it *might* be like, if our fortunes were completely reversed—if an act of God suddenly turned everything around for us (—to the better, not to the worse).

But what do we do when our fortunes seem to have been reversed in the wrong direction? What songs do we sing when everything seems to have fallen apart? What approach do we take to where we find ourselves? Do we work our way through denial, anger, bargaining and depression on our way to acceptance? Do we try to put a positive spin on things? To cheer ourselves up?

There has been a real tendency during these last months to try to cheer ourselves out of the funk that we've been in. It has been hard for all of us in one way or another. But many of us have been blessed with our health even while we see the numbers of those afflicted slowly creeping up. We start to feel guilty about our own emotions—we feel ashamed or guilty that we don't feel happy. After all, it's just an inconvenience—it's nothing compared to those who are *really* suffering.

And so many of us have tended to rationalize away our sadness. To try to overcome our disappointment with forced happiness—and this happens often in our interactions with others as well. We try to cheer others up or they do the same for us, not wanting anyone to “dwell” in the depression, even for a moment. We haven't felt like it's okay to really *feel* what we're feeling—to acknowledge the sense of loss that we feel. And in the pursuit of trying to make ourselves and others “happy” no matter what we're really feeling, we've created something else entirely: “toxic positivity”.

So to counter that positivity-that-never-quite-catches-on—to respond with integrity to the musicals where everything is happy all the time I have this to say: It's *okay* to acknowledge that we're unhappy—to accept those emotions without feeling guilty for them (thinking we *should* be happier). It's *okay* to be sad even when we know that God is good and every good thing comes from God. It's okay to be “in it” (“down in the doldrums”), and still hope that things will get better. We don't have to jump to the hope immediately.

But where is the good news in my message today? What do I say to those around me (to those *of us*) who are still waiting for their miracle from God? Their reversal of fortune?

God has the bigger picture in mind. Those small blessings that seem to be going to others (and not us) may actually be part of a bigger plan to bless even more people. Samuel was not just a blessing for his mother Hannah, but for all of Israel. Jesus was not just a blessing for Mary, but for all people—and both were examples of God's power to overturn the established order and bring about something new—something God had always had in mind—in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise God made even to our ancestors.

God is still at work. The story isn't over yet.