

Mary, Moana, and the Gospel (A Sermon for St. Mary's Day 2017)

St. Mary's Episcopal Church (Cypress, Texas)

Luke 1:46-55

August 20, 2017

Who here has seen the movie Moana? Pretty much all of us, right? Who here has seen it probably a billion times?

So for the grown ups out there that don't know, let me give them an overview. I'll try not to spoil anything...

Moana tells the story of a young Polynesian princess whose people's way of life is completely dependent on their island. When food and resources become scarce, the people are forced to figure out a way to respond.

Moana obstinately resolves against her father's wishes to solve the crisis by searching for Maui, a demigod who gave up his divinity to become human, who supposedly stole a precious stone, "The Heart of the Sea," from Te Fiti, an island goddess that gives prosperity to the environment. Without it, Moana's people will become extinct.

She sets out to deliver Maui to Te Fiti so that he can return the Heart to the island.

As I've thought about the general plot of Moana, it struck me as very similar, at least at the beginning, to Mary and Jesus.

First we have Moana, a young girl that is given the big task of delivering Maui, the half-man/half-god who alone can save the people.

Then we have Mary, a young girl that is given the big task of delivering Jesus, the fully-man/fully-God who alone can save the people.

But in Mary's case, it's real life.

I've brought some pictures of artwork. These are all paintings and sculptures in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. There is a big church there where countries from all around the world have put art showing how they view Mary.

If you're like me, you're used to seeing Mary as this young, fragile, girl wearing a white robe and a blue sash. That's the image that pops into my head. In my mind, I picture Mary looking just like us.

But look at all this art. Some of these, like Thailand and China, don't look anything like that. And they don't look anything like us.

Because Mary didn't look anything like us. She's from another country, another culture.

But she was just like us. She had struggles just like us. She wasn't rich, she wasn't powerful, she was just a normal kid. She probably knew about being lowly and may have even known what it is like to be hungry.

Another similarity between Mary and Moana is singing. I don't know about you, but I love the Moana soundtrack.

If you've seen the movie, there's a part early on where Moana is singing, and then she dreams of being on the water as a voyager, exploring for new worlds. But that's not what her and her people do anymore. Moana is singing about a world she has never known...but it is also a world that is going to come true by end of the movie.

And in our reading today, Mary begins to sing of a world she had never known.

Mary sings about a world that has already changed. Mary sings of the world the way God sees the world—the way God reveals the world to be in the life of Jesus Christ.

Mary sings of a world where the weak are made strong, where the hungry have enough to eat, and where the lowly are lifted up.

Mary sings of an upside down world. In fact, later on, after Jesus died, rose again, and ascended, his disciples were accused of doing just that. The religious leaders of the day were upset that Jesus' followers were "turning the world upside down."

That's a big idea, isn't it? That the world will be turned upside down. Not literally, like we're all flipping over. But here's an example that might help us understand what we're talking about.

Here's one of my kids' shirts. You know when you take off a shirt, or grab it out of the dryer, it sometimes gets all twisted up. The armholes get stuck inside, or the bottom starts coming out of the neck hole?

When this happens, the shirt doesn't fit right. Your arms can't go in, or it makes it too tight...it just doesn't fit right.

When this happens to Walker, I love what he says. He'll bring me the shirt, and say, "Daddy, can you right-side-out this?"

That's what Mary is singing about. Mary lives in a world that just doesn't fit right. Her family and friends are being ruled over by people that don't really like them. But Mary knows that her baby boy will be the one to right-side-out the world.

And we live in a world that doesn't fit right. We fight with each other. We have boys and girls in our schools and our neighborhoods that don't have enough food to eat. We have people who think they are better than others, just because of the way they look or act. The world doesn't fit right.

So one more connection with Moana. There isn't a lone hero in that movie. Moana first wanted to deliver Maui so that he could save the island. But in the end, they had to work together.

They work together, and help each other, and they are able to save the island.

The same is true for us. Jesus wants our help. And we can't do it alone.

Jesus wants us to look for those people that are sad, or scared, and help them. Jesus wants us to work together, as families and friends and even a whole church. Jesus wants us to help make the world right-side-out.

Can we do that?

Amen.