

Reflection | Becoming Sanctuary, Where Love Dwells Freely and Abundantly  
Micah 2 & Luke 1 | Knox-Metropolitan United Church  
The Fourth Sunday Of Advent | The Sunday of LOVE | December 19, 2021  
Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory | Cameron Fraser

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Becoming Sanctuary

Where Love Dwells Freely

And Abundantly

On this, the fourth Sunday of Advent

As we light a candle for Love

We are also invited to ponder the term Sanctuary

It is not lost on me that there is a certain irony,

Inviting this reflection

When we have set ourselves up to worship together

In a room that is not the one we call,

Sanctuary

Sanctuary is an interesting lens for our readings

Mary has received life-altering news that she will bear

In her own body through bearing and birthing a child

The possibility of salvation, of liberation for her occupied people.

She consents and literally makes sanctuary of her own self

Then in the midst of all of this,

She seeks sanctuary

She goes to a safe place

The home of her cousin Elizabeth

She finds there sanctuary of two kinds

Literally a place to be cared for

But also an affirmation of her own witness of what she conceives as possible

It is in and out of this sanctuary

That she proclaims

We could also say preaches

Her Magnificat, her song of freedom

Which itself is borne out of the safe space

Of the words of her ancestors

Her song is in many ways

A re-interpretation of the song, sung by her name-sake

Myriam, sister of Moses

When the Red Sea closed over the advancing Egyptian Army

Leaving the people of Israel free on the shore

Ready to begin their long walk to freedom

Her song is also

In many ways

Akin to the Psalms

Which would have been by her people

Over generations of challenges

Invasion

Exile

And now occupation

The Psalms were for Mary's people

A safe place to utter hope

To utter dreams of freedom

In the face of impossible circumstances

And another layer

Her song ends with one of her people's primal stories

Sarah and Abraham

And the promises made to them

And even her hardest words (or most inspiring depending on our perspective)

Of Rulers pulled from thrones

Hungry filled with good things

Rich going away empty

These echo of the Hebrew Prophets

Who both challenged and sometimes terrified their people

But also offer a Sanctuary of hope

Amidst devastation and desolation

Mary's song springs forth from her

From that sanctuary within her soul and imagination that freedom is possible

She has carried as a child of Sarah the matriarch

A descendant of Myriam who proclaims the defeat of the Egyptian Armies

In the line of Deborah and Jael who stopped invading forces in their tracks

Of Ruth who boldly claimed for herself citizenship and a future

Her song shows a literacy in the lineage of liberation of which she is part

So when the Christmas Carol asks

Mary did you know?

The answer is a resounding yes!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06xY6FnEPN8>

(An Expansive Justice focused re-write of *Mary Did You Know?*)

And so it is a beautiful circle

That Mary's own words then

Especially in the works of Womanist theologians

Latina Meujista theologians

Queer and non-binary theologians

That her words have likewise become a sanctuary

A sacred and safe space

In which one might place and nurture

Hope and dreams for a world that is not yet

But could be

Mary's song, like Myriam's, the Psalmists, and the Prophets

Is also full of Love

I don't mean piety here

But love and hope and regard and care

For their people

And these words are given in love

To nourish and nurture

Resilience and resistance

Just as Elizabeth's words and hospitality

Nourished and nurtured these things in Mary

As she will do for her child

The structure of Advent

Invites us to think of the connection between love and sanctuary

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/dec/15/bell-hooks-author-and-activist-dies-aged-69>

Many will have read that earlier this week

Of the passing of the indominable Gloria Jean Watkins,

Better known by the pen name she borrowed from her own lineage of liberation

in the form of her maternal great-grandmother

bell hooks

Writer and activist

Feminist, Black liberationist

Professor at Berea College, which was founded in 1855 by an abolitionist Presbyterian Minister, the first integrated and co-educational college in the South, and which has not charged any student tuition since 1892.

Love was a favourite subject of bell hooks

My own affection for her work

Came through reading *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, And Love*

<https://www.reginalibrary.ca/search/3129262>

Which eschews essentialist readings of gender and emotion

And offers a powerful critique of encultured expectations (and lack thereof)

One of hooks' definitive works was published in 2000, *All About Love: New Visions*

And I'd like to read an extended passage from that book

And invite us to reflect on its connection

To Mary's words

To Elizabeth's offering of sanctuary

And how they might illuminate for us

Some of the depths of this Advent invitation

To dwell in love

To make our home in love

<https://www.reginalibrary.ca/search/2438092>

<https://thedewdrop.org/2019/06/21/what-is-love-love-is-a-verb-bell-hooks/>

[https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/7c5e7149-5f02-fdad-94d7-4c5340c43797/bell\\_hooks\\_All\\_About\\_Love.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/7c5e7149-5f02-fdad-94d7-4c5340c43797/bell_hooks_All_About_Love.pdf)

*Imagine how much easier it would be for us to learn how to love if we began with a shared definition.*

*The word “love” is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we used it as a verb.*

*I spent years searching for a meaningful definition of the word “love,” and was deeply relieved when I found One in psychiatrist Scott Peck’s classic self-help book *The Road Less Traveled*, first published in 1978.*

*Echoing the work of Erich Fromm, he defines love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”*

*Explaining further, he continues: “Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.”*

*Since the choice must be made to nurture growth, this definition counters the more widely accepted assumption that we love instinctually.*

*Some folks have difficulty with Peck’s definition of love because he uses the word “spiritual.” He is referring to that dimension of our core reality where mind, body, and spirit are one. An individual does not need to be a believer in a religion to embrace the idea that there is an animating principle in the self—a life force (some of us call it soul) that when nurtured enhances our capacity to be more fully self-actualized and able to engage in communion with the world around us.*

*To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility.*

*We are often taught we have no control over our “feelings.” Yet most of us accept that we choose our actions, that intention and will inform what we do. We also accept that our actions have consequences.*

*To think of actions shaping feelings is one way we rid ourselves of conventionally accepted assumptions such as that parents love their children, or that one simply “falls” in love without exercising will or choice, that there are such things as “crimes of passion,” i.e., he [hurt] her because he loved her so much.*

*If we were constantly remembering that love is as love does, we would not use the word in a manner that devalues and degrades its meaning.*

*When we are loving we openly and honestly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust.*

*Definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. A good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up. As we move toward our desired destination we chart the journey, creating a map.*

*We need a map to guide us on our journey to love—starting with the place where we know what we mean when we speak of love.*

*love is the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.”*

*When we are loving we openly and honestly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust.*

I wonder if something grips you here as significant?

I wonder how we might view aspects of our shared life as Knox-Metropolitan United Church in this light...

Our Commitment to become an Affirming Ministry?

The many phone calls made over the pandemic to check in on one another.

Our ongoing discussions of how to respond to the needs of those who seek shelter at the church

Our invitations to join with RAPM in seeking to transform a system that requires band aid solutions to hunger and lack is itself a witness to love, a demonstrative expression of a belief in the worth of others and the responsibility of our society to ensure adequacy and dignity.

The Prayer Calendar offered by the Board to the whole of the KMUC community has been an invitation to nurture within ourselves a sense of recognition, care and responsibility, for our shared life as a community of faith.

[https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/57b138d5-5b59-657f-eb34-27ed656d51fd/KMUC\\_Prayer\\_Calendar.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0G0qxR3quXXz\\_F7K3pdEAvw0zPAPlhQ2sHlx9hvLI\\_lkSGJvjqiaoAsvc](https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/57b138d5-5b59-657f-eb34-27ed656d51fd/KMUC_Prayer_Calendar.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0G0qxR3quXXz_F7K3pdEAvw0zPAPlhQ2sHlx9hvLI_lkSGJvjqiaoAsvc)

Have you been following along?

How has that been for you?

Current calendar ends on Dec 31

Plans for a new one to begin on Epiphany Sunday (Jan 9)

To close, I want to invite us, in this spirit

To take one line of Mary's song

*Fill the Hungry with Good Things*

And engage, in love, in an act of Magnificat-ing

Can you do something to fill the hungry with good things?

Yesterday Folks from a number of downtown churches, including KMUC made and distributed bagged lunches and provided warm space, coffee, and hospitality out of FBC across the street. This has grown out of conversations about the need for space and a response to homelessness and precarity & broader issues of poverty vis a vis SIS program. Plans to do so more regularly in the new year and see where this action takes.

Regina currently has three community fridges, in which one can drop off groceries so that anyone who needs them can pick them up. Folks can also help by maintaining the fridge, and each one has online options to either order food that a volunteer will pick up, or to make a general donation.

<https://www.facebook.com/CathedralCommunityFridge>

<https://www.cathedralcommunityfridge.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/reginacommunityfridgecathedral/>

<https://www.instagram.com/heritagecommunityfridgeregina/>

<https://www.instagram.com/reginacommunityfridge/>

The Darul Falah Islamic Centre (11<sup>th</sup> Ave) has been offering food to anyone in need each Friday and they accept e-transfers to help with this work...

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story\\_fbid=1505432239828383&id=326912648103092](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=1505432239828383&id=326912648103092)

We end again with words from bell hooks which remind us that in love we claim responsibility and express commitment to care and trust, respect and nurture...

*love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love."*