

Spokeswoman for 3M?

Sermon, December 17, 2017
The Third Sunday of Advent
Texts: Luke 1:46-55; John 1:1-14

I'll admit from the start that the sermon title is a bit of a reach, but it was sort of inspired by a headline I came across while on line some time ago: "SPOKESWOMAN FOR 3M" referred to an offer made in 2012 to singer Christina Aguilera, who was offered 3Ms ... as in three million dollars ... to be the spokeswoman of a dating website service for, shall we say, LARGER people like me. The website is "TheBigandBeautiful.com".¹ However, the sermon is not about Christina Aguilera.

Nor is the sermon about another familiar 3M ... the **3M Company**, formerly known as the **Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company**, a \$30 billion enterprise employing ninety thousand people worldwide that started from a simple mining operation in Minnesota that nearly failed due to the increasingly obsolete need for what they were originally mining. The entrepreneurial company adapted, expanded and grew to go on to produce thousands and thousands of varied products including abrasives, adhesives, automotive products, chemicals, electronics, films, protective equipment and many others. I learned from someone at the earlier service 3M once hired another "M," M.C. Hammer, to be a spokesman for the company,² but this sermon is not about him nor the 3M Company.

No, the "Spokeswoman for 3M" I refer to today is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who sang her Magnificat as recounted in our Gospel reading this morning. Mary sang of the 3Ms of God: the **M**indfulness of God, the **M**ight of God and the **M**ercy of God. You might say Mary's Magnificat is sung in the Key of "M" ... Mary Magnifies the Mindfulness, the Might and the Mercy of God. God's Mindfulness, Might and Mercy ... The M&M&Ms of God!

In the Latin translation, "Magnificat" is the first word of the first line, "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum.*" ("*My soul magnifies the Lord.*") hence the traditional title of this very first Christmas carol. "Anima" is Latin for the animating force, the soul, that gives the corporeal body life and vitality; and Mary wants to use all the animating force and vitality of her life and heart to **magnify** these 3Ms of God. The Latin "Magnificat" is the translation of the original Greek word "Megalunei" (*which might sound at first like something of a large duck*). "Megalunei" (μεγαλύνει) literally means to make large, to make conspicuous. It's also contains the same root word from which we get the word Megaphone; as you know, a megaphone enlarges a voice, it magnifies a voice, it makes the voice loud, conspicuous, attention-getting. And that's what Mary wants to do with all her animated soul; she wants to magnify, megalunei, God.

What does it mean to "megalunei" God; what does it mean to **magnify** the Lord? As I pointed out in years past when we've looked at this passage, it may help to think in terms of opposites. The opposite of "to magnify" is to shrink, to reduce in size, to minimize. We can magnify the Lord and His significance and His influence and His reality in our lives, or we can minimize God and His significance and His influence and His reality in our lives. However, when we do the latter, we usually wind up magnifying everything else way out of proper proportion.

The last time we looked at this I recalled that TV show from the late sixties, "The Land of the Giants," a rather ill-fated series I believe lasted less than two seasons. Producer Irwin Allen had four series in that decade of the sixties: "*Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*," "*Lost in Space*," "*Time Tunnel*" and "*The Land of the Giants*." The setting for "The Land of the Giants" was far, far in the future ... in the pilot program, the date on the dashboard of the spaceship read June 16 ... 1983! The basic plot was that Suborbital Flight 612, bound for London, crash landed and its crew and passengers soon realized they had not landed on Earth ... their vessel had entered some sort of time space warp, and they ended up on a planet like Earth, except that everything, including the human-like inhabitants, was twelve to fifteen times the size of its earthly counterpart. Everything in the **Land of the Giants** was magnified way out of proportion, and the passengers and crew were miniature. Each week they battled the hazards of giant children, giant dogs, giant cats, (magnifi-cats?) giant bugs, giant everything. Everything was gigantic to them ... things normally small and insignificant back on Earth were now monstrously huge, dangerous, life-threatening. Their being "minimized" had the result of magnifying the threat and danger of just about everything else around them.

It's not a perfect analogy, but something of the same thing happens when we don't magnify God, when we reduce Him, when we minimize His reality and diminish His importance in our lives. When we do that, when we shrink God, then just about everything else becomes a much larger threat from our human perspective. Magnifying God is about coming into focus with just how big God really is ... and just how small we are. Just Who is big and who is little? Just Who is powerful and who is weak? Just Who is Sovereign and who is servant? It's a fundamental human temptation to magnify ourselves, our opinions, our desires, while simultaneously reducing

¹ See <http://www.businessinsider.com/christina-aguilera-offered-3m-to-be-spokeswoman-for-big-and-beautiful-dating-site-2012-10>

² See <http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/watch-mc-hammer-help-brand-stop-hammer-time-literally-171026/>

God's reality, God's desires, God's perspectives. If God is not magnified, however, other things and other opinions and other moral codes and other concerns will be magnified out of proportion as a result. This is why magnifying God, making Him a large and conspicuous and central part of our lives, is so crucial. To magnify God is to increase our attention to and awareness of Him, which puts everything else in its proper perspective. *(Edited out from the spoken sermon, but included here, is a benediction I once heard that sums it up well: "May you love God so much, that you'll love nothing else too much. And may you fear God so much, that you will fear nothing else at all.")*

Mary knows how to magnify the Lord, and she is also an example of how God magnifies and lifts up those who magnify Him. We know the story ... God sent His angel to Mary, to tell her that she is about to receive this special favor from God. She was about to become the mother of the Savior. The young Mary was, of course, initially perplexed by all this. Why should God notice her and single her out for this immense honor? She was not a rabbi; she was not a prophet; she was not a princess; she was not a national leader; she was just a relatively anonymous young woman in an insignificant little town. But as she contemplated what was happening and what she was hearing, she began to make sense of it all. The more she thought about who God is, and what God does, the more things began to come together, and the less she cared about the opinions of others and the more she cared about the favor of God. The more she focused on God's grace and presence, the better she understood that God really was giving her the opportunity to play such an important role in the saving of the world. The bigger God became to her, the larger her joy grew, and the smaller her apprehensions became.

She magnified the mindfulness, might and mercy of God, which gave her a clearer perspective about who she was and what she was called to do. To be sure, she herself was not the savior, but she was used by God to bring the Savior into her world! That was what she was being called to do. And, by the way, that's what we are all called to do ... we are all called to do what we can to bring our Savior into the worlds where we live and work through our very lives. When we magnify God, when we maximize His significance in our lives, like Mary, the better we will see and perform our vital role in bringing the Savior and His saving, salvaging power and grace into the world about us ... a world so much in need of the Light.

A quote attributed to Francis of Assisi: *"Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words."* I like that. That speaks about being a magnifying glass, about living life in such a way that we become a lens through which other people can look and see God better. Even though I work with words, and spend hours each week hammering out the right words to say from this pulpit, I know words are so inadequate, so prone to being misunderstood, forgotten and/or ignored. Even I forget what I've said in some of my own sermons! *(In fact, I've calculated I have preached just about eleven hundred sermons since I first stood in this pulpit 21 years and one week ago ... I'm sure you remember every single word, but I have a little trouble doing so!)* Now, I do believe words are important, and I make every effort to speak well, correctly, succinctly, honorably, engagingly and clearly in a timely manner. Yet the most effective communicators of the reality of God's grace and love in my life have not necessarily been those who have been good with words; they have been those genuinely faithful people who have lived the quiet, consistent, faithful Christian witness of lives well lived, even if I can't remember a word of what they said. Such people **magnified** God in their faith-full lives by living and loving well ... their "megalunei" lives were a glass, a magnifier, through which I could look and see more clearly God's reality, God's grace, God's love. Such lives spoke as loudly to me as megaphones because they drew my attention to the only real Word that matters ... the Word described by the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

According to John, Jesus was that Word ... He was the fullest and clearest expression of God's thought, God's will, God's person, God's essence, God's personality ... and this "Word," this divine self-expression, "became flesh and dwelt among us." We also read, *"There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light."* John was another "Megaloooney;" he was called to be a magnifying lens through whom others could see the Light, a megaphone calling attention not to himself, but directing attention to the only real Word that matters.

Our mission is the same as Mary's, to bring our Savior into our worlds, and our mission is the same as John's, to witness to the Light. Our mission as individuals and as a church is to faithfully, consistently, patiently do what it takes to direct people to the only true Light there is. And we do that by preaching the Gospel always ... using words when we have to. We do that by magnifying God through the lens of faithful lives well lived. And I'm convinced the way we best do that is by making certain that, like Mary, we are **magnifying** God in our own souls, that we are making Him a conspicuous and obvious and important and large part of our lives ... making every effort to magnify God and living as He would have us live.

To close, I'd like us to repeat our Call to Worship earlier this morning:

"I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall be continually in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord. Let the humble hear and be glad.

O MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME, AND LET US EXALT HIS NAME TOGETHER."

Amen.