

Sermon – Luke 1:26-38, 46b-55
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Grace Lutheran Church
4 Advent – Year B
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“Musical Thrones”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. While we have yet to actually enter the Christmas season, our house is, I confess, knee deep in Christmas. The trees are decorated, the stockings are hung, the presents are wrapped. And Christmas carols, sacred and secular, are playing nonstop. The other day, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” came on for the 4,732nd time. One of our kids looked at me and said, “I don’t like this song.” When asked why, the answer was simple: “Because we’re home *all the time*.” I admit it’s hard for kids to relate to the yearning of this World War II-era song. While Bing Crosby gave voice to the desire of American G.I.’s to come home, the greatest challenge of our children’s lives is a pandemic that forces them to stay home. To *not* see friends and family. To *not* gather in this sanctuary for worship. To miss out on so much of what normally defines this festive season. I think what our child was really giving voice to was their feeling that being at home is more than being in a house. We are stuck in our houses but kept from being with loved ones who make us feel at home. This year’s particular predicament is a variation on the common human theme of dislocation. Wherever we are, we have a sense that things are not as they should be. That we’re not in the right place. That things are unsettled. Unfortunately, we often try to settle things in the wrong way.
2. Our first reading this morning draws us back 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. After a time of turmoil and national upheaval, David has ascended to the throne. The youngest son of a farmer from Bethlehem, David’s rise was

remarkable. He *was* the lowly lifted up. Now, settled into his new home, David turns his attention to the Lord's housing situation. Comfortable in his house of cedar, David feels bad that God is still roughing it in the tent that has been the divine shelter since the days of the Exodus. He proposes the building of a temple. God, however, chastens David: "Did I ever speak a word with any of the leaders, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" But God's main objection comes later: "I have been with you wherever you went." God cannot be contained or quarantined. God is on the loose. How else to explain a shepherd boy like David becoming king? God is not content to sit around at home. God is on the move.

3. While David presumes to build a house for God, God promises to build a house for David: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever." God is not, of course, speaking about the house of cedar in which David is living. God is promising David that God will continue to act in history, that God will continue to raise up the lowly and dismantle the sinful structures and systems that inflict suffering on the lowly of this world, just as God has lifted up David. After the reigns of David and his son, Solomon, it seems that the promise goes unfulfilled. The nation splits in two and is overwhelmed by outside powers. Even after a return from exile, the throne sits vacant. By the time a young woman named Mary appears, the people have long lived under the thumb of Roman oppression. Mary, this firebrand of faith who finds favor with the Lord, is chosen to give birth to the Savior, the One through whom the promises shall be fulfilled. Like women of faith before her – Miriam, Deborah, Hannah – Mary sings a song of victory. She gives voice to the grace by which God lifts up the lowly, dislocating those who have become too at home in this world's brokenness, dislodging those who have taken it upon themselves to rule. In the song of Mary, this woman who will soon be denied a room in which to give birth to her child, in her song there is no longer any room for the proud, the mighty, the strong. They are being cast down. It is

- time to make room for the poor, to feed the hungry. God is on the move, lifting up the lowly.
4. Pastor Kate Moorhead tells the story of a South African boy. The year was 1940 and apartheid was the law of the land. The boy and his mother, both Black, were walking down the street hand in hand. A white man approached them. The law dictated that Black people had to step aside so that white people could pass, a clear reminder of who was mighty and who was lowly. They prepared to step aside when, to their surprise, the white man stepped off the sidewalk and tipped his hat to the boy's mother with respect and honor. Shocked, the boy and his mother walked down the center of the sidewalk. Looking up at his mom, he asked, "Why did that man stand aside and tip his hat? I thought that white men didn't do that? Why didn't he want us to step aside?" His mother answered, "Because, my son, that man is a man of God. That man is a priest?" "It was then and there," Moorhead writes, "that the little boy decided what he would do with his life. He too would become a priest. His name was Desmond Tutu." While history has no shortage of white clergy who have failed to catch the import of Mary's song and the message of her son, this priest had ears to hear. His simple action cleared the way for Tutu, not simply to walk down the street but to change the world with the power of a gospel that will not leave the powers of this world in place.
 5. God is on the move, moving out of power those who would cling to it, replacing them with a new king from the house of David. God is lifting up the lowly and it's time for this world's tyrants to step aside. The promised child growing within Mary gives her such confidence that her song sings in the past tense, as if it has all already happened. There is, in fact, a timelessness to Mary's song. Her words lift us out of the doldrums of death into the presence of God in which the differences between past, present, and future are erased. The preacher Fred Craddock writes, "So sure is the singer that God will do what is promised that it is proclaimed as accomplished fact," and, "here we

have a characteristic of the final judgment of God in which there is a complete reversal of fortunes: the powerful and rich will exchange places with the powerless and poor. And this eschatological reversal has already begun.” In Christ, God has made a new home with us, chasing the mighty from their thrones and giving grace and space to those long left out in the cold. While our world continues to groan under the weight of our sin, God’s promises are certain. The lowly will be lifted up. Will you and I continue to be part of the problem, or will we step aside, walking instead to the beat of Mary’s new song?

6. As we near Christmas, we remember that the birth is just the beginning, that Mary’s song is the score to a story that unfolds throughout her Son’s life. The gospel comes to life finally and fully in his death, in that moment when the powers that be crucify him rather than listen to his message of peace and grace. Power never lets go easily. But in lifting him up on the cross, they inadvertently lift Jesus onto his throne. Here, in what looks like suffering and shame, Jesus fulfills God’s promise to David, a thousand years in the making. In his death our sin is put to death, our old lives are laid to rest. In his resurrection the forces of this world that rebel against God are forever put to flight. They will continue to rage in the meantime, but their defeat is certain. The reign of peace has begun. God has made a home with mortals, and the lowly, hungry, and oppressed are welcomed in. May we be caught up in this revolution of love of which Mary sings.

7. Friends, God is still on the move. God would not accept being confined to a structure made by human hands. God would not remain unbounded in heaven. God would not stay quarantined in the tomb of death. God in Christ comes to make a new home with us here, wherever we find ourselves. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, may the song of Mary echo in our hearts. We may be stuck in our houses, but in Christ we are at home with a God on the

move, a God who has made a home with us. In Christ, our yearning for home is fulfilled by a God on the move, a God who is with us wherever we go. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.