

Reflection

Micah 5: 2-5a

Luke 1: 39-45

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Julie Lees

Title: A Manifestation of Love

Prayer: Holy One, open us up to taking risks, making mistakes and finding ourselves in you.  
Amen.

Time and time and time, and time and time again God uses the most vulnerable to get across God's message of love.

Mary – an unwed, pregnant teenaged girl – vulnerable.

John the Baptist – a man wandering in the wilderness talking gibberish (unless you really listened) - vulnerable.

David – the overlooked youngest brother, a sheep herder, small in stature; not in the running for kingship at all - vulnerable.

Jesus – a baby. Not born in a home or an inn or anywhere remotely sanitary, but in a stable, amongst the animals - vulnerable.

There's something about vulnerability that is attractive to God. Why?

To be vulnerable means to be at risk.

When we are vulnerable it feels like we're not holding all the cards, we have the potential to lose, we can't predict what will happen.

We don't like these feelings.

And this is not the way of our world today. The world today does not feel vulnerable. It feels like a competition: who is mightiest, who has the best insult, who is the strongest bully, who is right, whose armour is the toughest.

We are encouraged to focus on the scarcity, the conflict and the turmoil, and it makes us pick sides, shut down discourse, double down on a position and be certain no matter what.

There is an us and a them. There is an enemy to defeat and we are going to make darn sure we are on the winning side.

And the result? Not vulnerability but numbness.

Our only choice of survival in this kind of world is to numb our feelings. All our feelings.

Brene Brown went viral just over 12 years ago with her TED Talk on vulnerability. One of the things she said about vulnerability was that we tend to think of it as the centre of all of our difficult emotions. So if we can shut down our vulnerability – if we can go numb – then we can be safe, secure, we can deaden those feelings of discomfort we want so desperately to ignore. But there is a flip side. She says vulnerability is also the birthplace of positive emotions like joy and love and belonging and empathy. So when we go numb we deaden those too.

We need to be vulnerable in order to feel love, to have a sense of belonging, and to be empathetic with ourselves and others.

Risky in a power struggle kind of world.

But take heart. We aren't the first to live in this world model.

Micah was a minor prophet who was speaking to his people about corrupt rule, bribery, injustice for the poor, favour leaning toward the wealthy, home and land insecurity. And yet, he was also speaking of hope. Of one who would come from vulnerable and insignificant beginnings who would be great and who would be one of peace.

Mary was a young woman in the hill country of Judea with no voice in any court of power or influence and was living under the weight of Roman oppression; and yet she sang a song of confidence in God's promise to upend the powers that be, reverse the fortunes of an unjust world and lift up those who had been oppressed.

We are not alone. People have been here before.

If we look, we can see that God has always been journeying with us, offering opportunities all the way along to step into God's covenant of love and promise; to let go of our limited human perspectives and fears, and to adopt a covenant of love.

To become vulnerable.

I had an email exchange with someone this week and was really struck by something they said: "I can't help but believe that if more people could be vulnerable, feel love and be loving, what is manifesting in the world right now (insert your own topic: conflict, competition, bullying, certainty, turmoil, hunger, displacement) ... what is manifesting in the world right now could begin healing. Love seems to be difficult for so many now."

And why is love so difficult?

Because it's vulnerable. Because it's a risk. Because we might lose. Because we might get hurt.

Brene Brown says vulnerability is necessary – not good or bad – necessary. To be vulnerable is to do something without any guarantee. To be vulnerable is to have the courage to be imperfect. To be

vulnerable is to have a strong sense of love and belonging. To be vulnerable is to be authentic – to let go of who we think we should be and to be exactly who we are.

And who are we? God's beloved.

We are so wholeheartedly loved by God. A God who came to earth in human form in the MOST vulnerable of ways. God could have chosen any kind of human – a king, a celebrity, royalty, a professor, a social media influencer – so many options of people with influence and power. God didn't choose any of these. God chose perhaps the most vulnerable human possible. A baby in a smelly manger born to unwed, unknown and unwealthy parents.

Scripture tells us that God's covenant is more powerful than human evil; that God's purpose is not to destroy but to save us from our own habits of destruction and redeem us. And the Creator has chosen to teach us this, demonstrate this to us, guide us in this learning by picking the least likely and most vulnerable people over and over and over again.

So, what does that tell us?

I mean one thing it tells us is that God should really make better choices because the message hasn't really been received yet.

Aha, but that's a numb response. That's me whining. Me wanting the world to change around me without me having to do anything, to change anything, to risk anything.

Let's try that again.

God uses the most vulnerable to teach us that God's covenant of love is stronger than human evil, its purpose is to save us from our own habits of destruction and redeem us.

So, what does that tell us?

Maybe, that it is not through force that God's covenant will be enacted, but through love.

Maybe, that the most vulnerable among us are the ones with the most poignant perspective.

Maybe, that at our most vulnerable is when we have the greatest opportunity to manifest God's love in this world.

It feels like we can't change the world.

What if we believed we could?

I can't change you and you can't change me. But, I can notice a change in you – let's say I experience you as often being grateful – that's work you've done to change yourself, but by my witnessing of it, it has the opportunity to change me. And if it changes me, then I move in the world differently and

someone unknown to you might notice the change in me, and then change something in themselves ... and so on and so on.

Mary wasn't going to change the powers that be in Rome, she was only able to ponder the visitation of the angel Gabriel for herself and then choose to believe or not to believe. She chose to believe and in the end that kind of changed human history.

At the end of the Luke passage it says "and blessed is she who believes that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Is it that easy? All we have to do is believe what God says?

If we look back at those first examples of God using the most vulnerable to get across a message of love, then the answer would appear to be yes. Mary, John the Baptist, David, Jesus – they all believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to them by God.

And they are God's messengers for us today.

If they believed, then we can believe. Let's choose to believe that the fulfillment of God's covenant of love is possible; that it can – and will – happen with us.

Not to us. With us.

I believe that if we have the courage to be vulnerable, if we have the courage to risk getting hurt, being disappointed, losing motivation, making a mistake, admitting we have something to learn, then we build our ability to manifest God's covenant of love in the world today.

Because with each humbling experience we grow less numb, we rely on God a little more, we feel the reality of being human and start to accept it ... because surprise that's what we are, human. With each risk we take we begin to trust God's will, we make space for the vulnerability of others, we see the presence of God's love active in our lives and the world at large just a little bit more, we orient our day toward the manifestation of love.

Time and time and time again God uses the most vulnerable to get across the message of God's love.

Let's learn how to be more vulnerable.

Amen.