



TO BRING PEACE

LUKE 1:46-55

And Mary said,

“My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.
For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant.

Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed.

For you, the Almighty,
have done great things for me,
and holy is your Name.

Your mercy is for those who fear you
from generation to generation.

You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in the thoughts of
their hearts.

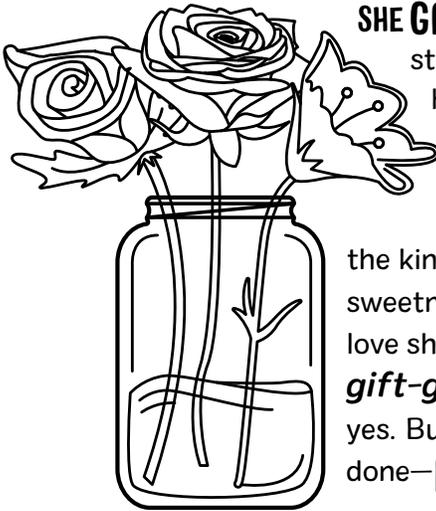
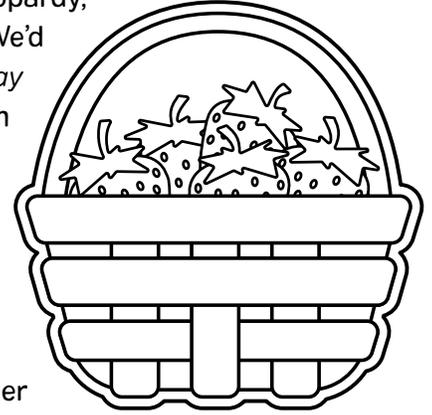
You have brought down the powerful from their
thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

You have filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

You have helped your servant Israel,
in remembrance of mercy—
according to the promise you made to our
ancestors—
to Sarah and Abraham
and to their descendants forever.”

This translation of Luke 1:46-55 comes from both the
New Revised Standard Version and The Inclusive Bible.

My friend was so upset. Her father was seriously ill, her job was in jeopardy, and crises in our broader community had her worried and frightened. We'd been walking for a long time—*kept choosing turns that would lead us away from her house*—because she wasn't yet ready to go home and be alone with all that was so hard. But as the evening drew on, we eventually wound our way to her front door. There, waiting for her—delivered sometime while she'd been out walking—was a small jelly jar full of fresh-cut blossoms in a couple of inches of water and a little turquoise basket cradling bright red strawberries.



SHE GASPED WHEN SHE SAW IT. And then she sat on her step and held each gift in turn, pulling the flowers to her face to breathe in their fragrance, choosing a plump strawberry on top to pop into her mouth. *She swallowed and sighed deeply.*

There was no card with the flowers or fruit, no indication from where the kindness had come. It was a pure gift. As I watched my friend relax into this sweetness, breathe slower and easier with this reminder that she was held by some love she could not even name, *I thought about how much this unknown gift-giver had brought to my friend's doorstep.* Blossoms and berries, yes. But also surprise, delight, and—in a way our conversation and walk hadn't done—**peace.**

As **ELUSIVE** as peace can sometimes seem,

as much as we talk about “peace of mind” or read scripture about an intangible, unquantifiable “peace that passes understanding,”

sometimes **peace** is as real as a daisy in a jar, as berry juice on your tongue.

Mary knew this when she sang about the new world, the one she sensed growing inside her, and in her community, as the child in her belly grew. Her people—the Jewish people—lived under Roman occupation, and Roman soldiers kept the “peace” by keeping everyone else under the constant threat of violence. It was an arrangement that harmed all who lived in it. **THE INJUSTICE IN HER COMMUNITY MEANT A DEEP PEACE WASN'T POSSIBLE FOR ANY OF THEM.**

And yet, the new world Mary sings about here isn't elusive or unquantifiable at all.

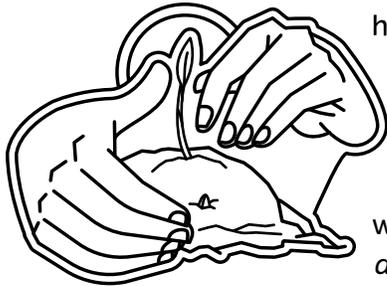
The hope she holds onto is one passed on to her from her ancestors: from Hannah, who sang this hymn of reversal and revolution in the Hebrew scriptures, to the Psalmist, who echoed praise to God for raising the poor from the dust and lifting the needy out of their desperation.

THE JUST AND LASTING PEACE THEY ALL SING ABOUT IS TANGIBLE.

It is a *concrete change in circumstances.*

It is a *rewriting of people's lived reality.*

To those who have been impoverished and oppressed, it feels like finally having a full belly. To those who have been privileged, **it feels like a rumbling stomach, like a reckoning of all that they've gained at the expense of others.** It feels like laying down the weapons by which that advantage is gained and picking up tools for building a more equitable and beautiful world: *like swinging a hammer, like dipping a paintbrush, like digging in the dirt, dropping in a handful of seeds; like kneading bread.*



We don't know exactly where Mary is when she sings this song. Luke situates it during her visit to Elizabeth, so there's an audience of one, maybe two, if Zechariah is nearby. I like to imagine Mary stepping from their home out into a crowded neighborhood street as she sings, *her words reminding her hearers of those promises from their past, inspiring hope that they have not been forgotten.*

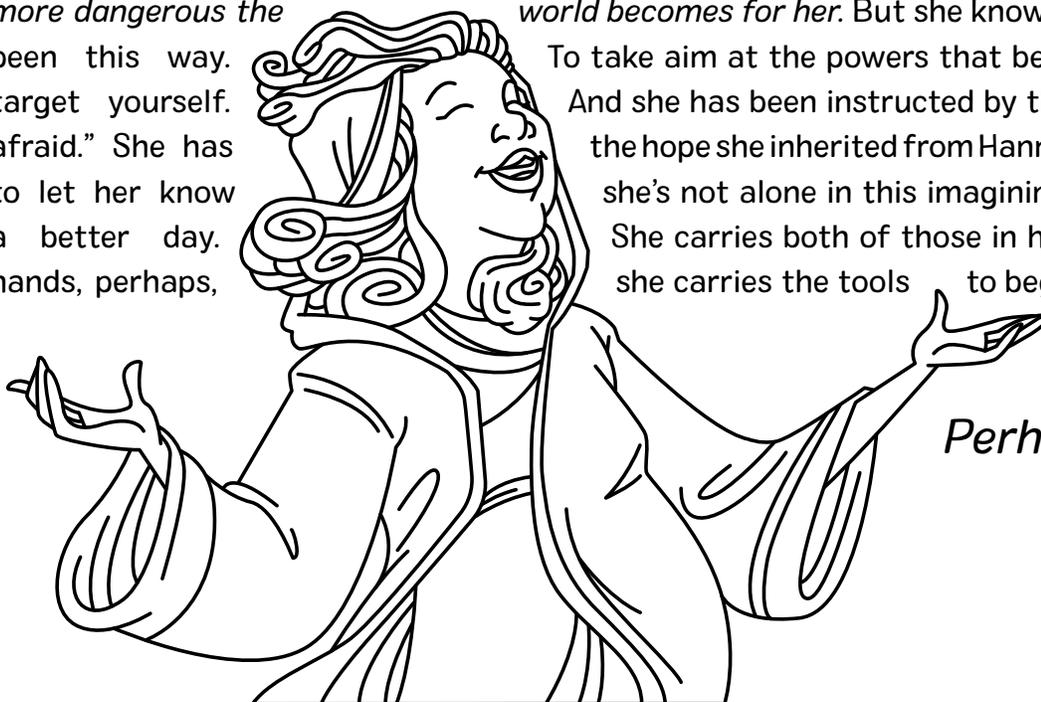


The more public it is, though, the more of a threat it becomes.

The more Mary's words begin echoing in the streets, the more people start humming along, the more dangerous the world becomes for her. But she knows this: it has always

been this way. target yourself. afraid." She has to let her know a better day. hands, perhaps,

To take aim at the powers that be means becoming a And she has been instructed by the angel: "Do not be the hope she inherited from Hannah and the Psalmist she's not alone in this imagining, this yearning for She carries both of those in her heart. And in her she carries the tools to begin building a better world.



Perhaps we all do.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

What are some tangible things that help bring you peace when you're worried, upset, or frightened?

What's a message, value, or dream you've inherited from your ancestors?

GOING DEEPER

How can you tell when people, communities, or countries are not at peace?

What are some ways you might bring peace to a loved one or a neighbor? How might you bring peace to a stranger or your community?

How might things in your community, your country, or the world need to change in the process of creating a just and lasting peace?