



“Creation’s Magnificat”

A sermon preached by E. Scott Winnette

December 29, 2019

Luke 1:46-55

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.¹

Maya Angelou’s free bird leaps, floats, dips and dares. In our striving world kaleidoscopes of creatures are free: birds fly, fish swim, insects cavort, butterflies migrate. Many humans are free-ish too: free to respect self, free to love, free to share, free to dare. The Christmas Star was free to lead. The Angels free to sing. The Magi free to discover. The bird dares claim the sky, but it had limits; couldn’t fly without tiring; couldn’t fly too high; needed to snack on bugs while flying in freedom. The innkeepers were free to say, “no” to Mary and Joseph but likely not free to say “no” to a visiting Roman dignitary. The shepherds weren’t wholly free (captive to the suspicions held against nomads) and yet they had enough agency to go find the newborn child. Joseph may have been free to leave Mary; but how many of us would not follow the directions of an angel? Was did he have free will, really? Was Mary free to say “no – find another mother?”

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage

¹ Maya Angelou. Caged Bird. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48989/caged-bird>

his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

Many creatures are caged: mountain lions, jaguar, bears and coyotes squeezed into smaller and smaller wooded acres; ocean creatures imperiled by plastics; insects suffer declines; chickens in boxes and plants bioengineered sterile - caged. Too many humans are caged, captive to war; caged by hunger, caged by sexist, homophobic, racist practices, caged by sex trade's human trafficking.

Was Mary a caged bird? She was forced to go to Bethlehem's tax count. She lived as a colonized Jew under the tyranny of the Roman empire. Mary was a peasant woman captive to patriarchal culture. But Mary still had agency. Mary with the agency she had; knowing she was favored by God, having spoken to an angel, respected by her Joseph; Mary didn't waste the bit of power she had. She sang for herself and she sang for others.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and [her] tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Mary sang the Magnificat; sang its protest, sang its promise of freedom and liberation. She sang of great reversals: proud scattered, mighty deposed; low brought high, hungry filled, rich deprived. Mary is believed to be a spokesperson of the *anawim*, the poor ones. *Anawim* included the physically poor but also the lowly, the sick, the downtrodden, the widows and orphans. It is believed the Magnificat, was their song of hope, their song for freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

None of us are free; absolutely free. Yet – we know, we are freer than most. We have plenty of agency. We choose to be here. We have the resources to get here. And as you have chosen to be here; I ask that you pursue fresh ways to sing freedom for others, use your voice, your resources, both as individuals and as a part of many collections of people – use your agency as Mary did to sing reversals. Sing her words again; that the poor get lifted up; that the abusive powerful lowered; and the silenced heard, the hungry filled and the rich restricted. And then, let us use our agency to sing for the world's freedom for the creatures, the mountains, the insects, the grasses, trees, waters and skies.

Poet Dr. Ann Elvey, eco-feminist and professor at Monash University of Australia reimagines the Magnificat as a protest song for creation.²

Our souls and our spirits celebrate
Earth enlarges
We breathe Earth's breath
God has seen the mountaintop removed
And the valley filled with [waste]
God knows the shame of kin torn from Country
And has looked on the coral in its reef
On this basis we are called fortunate
And God, holy
Whose mercy is from generation to generation
For air and oceans, mercy
For dying species, mercy
For inundated islands, mercy
For displaced islanders, mercy
For asylum seekers, mercy
For our children and grandchildren, mercy
For all species now to come, mercy
God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts
God has brought down coal magnates
And renewed despoiled habitats
God has sustained endangered species
And summoned to account the shareholders
God has slowed the thundering roadtrain and
From the pouch of the prone roo has lifted the joey
God has shaken the foundations of our comfort
And crawled into the burrow of the endling, [the last one]
We barely believe this to be true
Because God does not do this alone –
Reminding us of the promise
Earth is waiting for us to remember
Earth is waiting for us to abide
It is by Earth's covenant we are bound with God
And our descendants forever.

² Graham Buxton. The Nature of Things: Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation