

“FOR YOU, TO BEAR YOUR FLESH IN WEAKNESS”
Is 66:1–2; Ps 113; Jas 4:6–10; Lk 1:46–55

We all know the story of the Prince and the Pauper. I remember watching the 1937 in black and white, version, perhaps you have as well. I believe it starred Errol Flynn. Hollywood gave this theme, another go in 2000 updating it a little bit and give a little more modern take. But the story isn't just for grownups. Disney got a hold of it, and you can imagine what happened there. They realized that it was good for children as well, and so Mickey Mouse starred his own version of the Prince and the Pauper. And if that wasn't enough, Garfield even gave it a try. It was called “A Tale of Two Kitties.” Your kids or grandkids may have seen that. And if that weren't enough, even Barbie got in on the action with “The Princess and the Pop Star.”

It's easy to see, though, why this story has stuck around for as long as it has. It has as its basic idea, if you haven't seen it, is that that a prince is tired of the rules, tired of the of the responsibilities of royalty, of all the protocol that is involved in being Prince. And he just wants to be a regular person, a regular kid. He wants to have some freedom. And he stumbles upon this poor boy that is almost his double who could absolutely pass for him. And this is a perfect chance for a stop. The Pauper, of course, is eager to try out the soft lifestyle of luxury and privilege, and so they make their plans. This idea, however, of the high and mighty switching places with the lowly is a powerful image, I think, that resonates with us. Even Mary speaks about that in her Magnificat which we heard just a few moments ago. She talks about something similar, although not exactly similar. She puts a little different spin on it. She describes how the powerful are brought down from their thrones, the rich are set away, empty handed, and the humble are lifted up.

It kind of fits into our sense of fairness these days. We might think, yeah, let the rich get a taste of what it's like to be poor. Let the poor finally catch a break. But what God is talking about here is something bigger than a than simple role reversals. He has a much greater exchange in mind, because unlike the Prince and the story, Jesus, is much, much more than royalty. He's the very Lord that Mary praises in her Magnificat. Everything she says about God perfectly fits Jesus—perfectly applies to him. For example, Mary says holy is his name. Well, Jesus name is so holy that it's the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved! Mary also says that the Lord is to be feared. And when we see Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, we understand that awe inspiring power He, the very Son of God, has, and we understand that fear, of course, in the good sense. And Mary says that that God humbles the mighty. Think about how Jesus constantly silenced those who thought they were so clever, those who tried to trick him and challenge him—challenge his authority, always trying to back him into a corner, get him to say something that he would regret, something that they could use against him. He did it with the devil in the desert. He did it with the religious leaders, the scribes, the Pharisees, Sadducees, He consistently stopped them in their tracks, showing them the true meaning of humility. So Jesus isn't just a prince.

He's God himself, and yet he comes with humility when Mary spoke those words of the Magnificat, she was just in her first trimester, there were no visible signs, no baby bump, as we would say today, nothing to show that Jesus was even there, he's tiny, he's vulnerable, and yet he's the greatest of all.

His greatness isn't what we usually expect. His Greatness is found in weakness. Think about this. He is so great. He's willing to become human, to take on our human flesh and blood, just so we can take our place and his ultimate greatness, his ultimate strength, is revealed when he appears at His weakest, hanging on the cross. That's where he shows his true power—power to save us, because that's what we truly need. This exchange. What Jesus does for us is so much greater than any spot between a prince and a pauper. Because, in reality, we are worse off than paupers. A pauper is defined with empty hands. We sang in our hymn sing earlier before this service, the hymn “Rock of Ages” and specifically that one stanza which said, “Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.” That's us. A pauper is defined by empty hands—by his poverty. So are we. But Mary rejoices that even though we're humble, the Lord still looks upon us, and in that humility, we realize how completely dependent we are on him for everything, absolutely everything.

It was Dr Martin Luther who, on his deathbed, held a piece of paper, and what was written on a piece of paper are considered to be his last words. It was written in both German and in Latin. The German said “Wir sind alle Bettler.” “We are all beggars.” And the Latin read “Hoch est verum.” “This is true.”, or maybe with Luther: “This is most certainly true”, right? We're all beggars. This is true. It's a humble statement of Luther, absolutely. But it becomes something truly amazing when we know who we're begging from.

Empty hands held out to the Lord are filled instantly. Mary says it “The Lord fills the hungry with good things.” We're like hungry beggars, paupers, with our hands outstretched before the Lord. But it's not just what we're lacking that he supplies. We also bring something else to the table. We bring our sin. Jesus not only humbled himself by becoming human, but he humbled Himself even more by taking our sins upon himself, and with our sins, He also took the consequences of our sins, death. Even the agonizing death of a cross. That's a far greater exchange than any prince or pauper, because Jesus truly identifies with us.

In that story, both the Prince and the Pauper realized that the other's life really isn't all it's cracked up to be, and they're both ready to go back to their original places. But Jesus knew exactly what he was getting into when he became one of us, when he identified with sinful humanity, he knew it would lead him to the cross we, on the other hand, discover that his place—a place of righteousness and peace with God, the Father, is truly amazing. It's the good things that he fills us with. And even better, we don't have to go back to the way we were before. Even after his death and resurrection. Jesus kept his human nature. Now in a glorified, sinless body, that means he's always there for us. Jesus is always there for us. He understands what we go through because he experienced himself. He draws near to strengthen us when we face temptation.

We feel the shame of our sin. Even when we don't feel this presence, He's there offering strength and forgiveness. He's there for you, for you, and this exchange, is so much greater, because in Christ, you become more than just a prince even, you become a child of God, destined to dwell with the Father for all eternity. Remember Mary's words, he fills the hungry with good things. In Christ, you're filled with the Lord's own goodness, His righteousness, His mercy, His promises, his eternal life, your adoption as his dear child.

He became weak so that you might become strong—strong against the shame of sin that you now have because of His mercy, strong against the fear of death because you've received His eternal life.

And it is in this incredible exchange when God takes up residence in Mary's womb, so that he can take your sin and fill you with His righteousness and with His mercy, that Mary rejoices. She has every reason to rejoice, because this exchange is greater than any other reversal of fortune. In a few moments, we're going to sing with Mary those same words of the Magnificat paraphrased a little bit better words nonetheless. And we have every reason to sing because the Savior came a meekness for you and for me to bear our sins in His flesh, to take our weakness, to take it all upon Himself that we might be His forever. The name of Jesus, Amen.