

May 9, 2021

“Mothers and the Spirit”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

John 14:15-17, 25-27

Rev. Rebecca Mincieli, 508-548-3050

Well, in today’s scripture, we heard Jesus promise to send us a divine Helper – the Holy Spirit, to help us get through this life by drawing on a higher power from above. And I’ll talk more about the Holy Spirit in a minute. But isn’t it also true that, in his wisdom, God has also given us a special earthly helper to guide us through as well. A helper called, “Mother.” Yes, our mothers. And so on this Mother’s Day, I want to talk about a special Biblical mother, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Because regardless of who we are, mothers or not, we can and should learn from her. Now we don’t hear or speak much about Mary, except of course at the time of Jesus’ birth, where she is effectively the main character of the Christmas story. And of course at his death on the cross, where she experiences every mother’s worst nightmare as she too endures the pain and suffering her child is going through. You mothers out there know that feeling, don’t you – sharing in your child’s distress, when they’re sick, or they’ve been in an accident, or when they’ve made a terrible mistake?

Now, besides these, there are also two other stories in the Bible that involve Mary. First, when the family is in Jerusalem, and Jesus heads off by himself at twelve years old and goes to the synagogue and begins reading and teaching from the Torah. Now the elders are delighted and amazed by the young Jesus, but since he’s disappeared without telling his parents where he was going, Mary is in a state of panic, searching everywhere, until she finally finds him. As any mother would, Mary admonishes him, but Jesus, like all kids seem to do, comes up with a perfectly logical excuse – “I was in my Father’s house.” And who could argue with that? So, everyone ends up relieved and happy. That incident does prove though, that even 2,000 years ago, when there were no computers, a mother is still the best search engine on earth! And the second story is when Jesus is at a wedding with his mother and they’ve run out of wine. For those of you who watched the series *The Chosen*, they dedicated an entire episode to this incident, where Jesus performs his first miracle. And when I think of that story, even though Mary speaks just ten words, I believe she imparts to us a valuable lesson.

Because this is my thought on how the wedding miracle really went down. “Jesus, you won’t believe this. They’re out of wine. I’m so embarrassed for the bride and groom. You have to do something fast, otherwise the wedding is going to be ruined.” To which Jesus replies, “Mom, please, let’s just leave it alone. It’s really none of our business. It’s been a long day, we’ve traveled many miles to get here, I’m tired, and I really don’t want to start performing any miracles now.” Then Mary gives her grown-up

son “the look.” You all know, “the look.” It's that nonverbal method of communication mothers have that tells you unequivocally, who's the boss. Mary then says, “Sorry, Jesus,...but that’s your job! Now if you’re not going to tell the waiter, I will. Pssst, Mr. Waiter, Mr. Waiter. Come over here. Yes, I know you don’t have any more wine. But this is my son, Jesus, you’ve heard of him haven’t you? No! Well, don't worry, you will. Now I want you to do exactly as he tells you. Exactly. Do you understand? Good.” And then Mary calmly walks off, talking to the other guests, listening to the music, having a great time... and anxiously waiting for her next glass of fine wine. Now this could have been a very stressful situation for everyone. But I think Mary could be calm and confident in that situation because she fully trusted that she could go to and draw on that higher power that would indeed help her. And so she went ahead, assured that she, with Jesus, had the whole situation under control.

I’m sure you mothers can relate to this “interpretation,” because you’ve ‘been there, done that.’ For most mothers are like Mary. They seem to draw on a higher power that gives them help and strength in those tough times. A power that enables them to do what they need to do. That’s why mothers know how to love unconditionally. They know how to sacrifice with joy. They know how to have the patience of a saint. They know how to suffer in silence. They know how to faithfully persevere. There’s a touching poem by Joaquin Miller that speaks to those trials mothers go through. It's called “The Greatest Battle Ever Fought.” Let me read a few lines for you:

*The greatest battle that ever was fought— Shall I tell you where and when?
On the maps of the world you will find it not: it was fought by the mothers of men.
Yes, deep in a walled up woman’s heart; a woman that would not yield;
But bravely and patiently bore her part; Lo! there is that battlefield.*

*No marshaling troops, no(spirited) song, No banner to gleam and wave;
But, oh, these battles they last so long— From babyhood to the grave!
Oh ye with banners and battle shot, with soldiers to shout and praise,
I tell you the noblest of victories ever fought, are fought by mothers, in unseen ways.*

I wonder how many battles Mary must have fought. I mean, she and her husband Joseph were poor peasants. I can imagine the house they must have lived in. It probably was only one large room, typical of that time, and housed several people. There’s a verse in the Gospel of Mark where the townspeople, talking about Jesus, questioned, “Is this not our carpenter, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas

and Simon. Are not his sisters living here with us?" By my count, that's at least nine people, two parents, five boys and at least two girls. And like any person, especially in those days, when a woman stayed home performing all the domestic duties and chores, Jesus probably developed many of his attitudes about life and relationships through the interactions with his mother and brothers and sisters. When Jesus spoke about the two sparrows which sold for a coin, perhaps he was remembering how Mary had to do anything necessary to make ends meet and put food on the table. When Jesus spoke of patching cloth on an old coat, perhaps he was recalling how he watched his mother sew many a patch on his and his siblings' clothes. When asked, "How many times shall a brother sin against me and I forgive him?" I wonder if Mary's patience and understanding influenced him as he answered, "Seventy times seven." Or how about Jesus' attitudes regarding women, sinners, the poor, the diseased or disenfranchised? Where did he get his understanding, his compassion, his servant attitude? Why was Jesus so filled with joy and love that saints and sinners alike invited him into their homes to be near them and eat with them? Could it be that Mary, the mother of Jesus, helped influence these attitudes? Could Mary have been concerned about money and bills and the future, struggled with children, faced the death of a spouse, put up with all the hardships and unfairness in life, and yet remain positive and gentle and joyful and faithful? Perhaps, like your mother, like you mothers.

You see, no one here today, and no one back then, not even the fully human Jesus Christ or his mother, is immune from the troubles and difficulties of this world. That's why we all need help. Divine help. Like Mary, we need to come to and draw on a power that is greater than us. You know, when the angel came and told Mary that she would bear the Son of God, he said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." And Mary opened herself to power of the Holy Spirit. And she was at peace, confident that she was in God's hands, and her situation was under control. And that's the power Jesus promised us in today's Scripture. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to be our helper. Now the word used here to describe the Holy Spirit is a Greek word, *parakletos*, which can be translated not only as helper, but also as counselor, comforter, advocate, encourager. Just consider what those words mean and how this divine power could impact your life. Helper, counselor, comforter, advocate, encourager. When you think of this, doesn't it make sense that the Holy Spirit should be the most influential power in our lives. The very Spirit of God within us, so that even when we are faced with life's most trying situations, we know that we are not alone, and that we have the power of the Most High who has promised to help us, lead us, heal us, comfort us, make us whole. Like Mary, when we draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be at peace, confident that we are in God's hands and our situation is under control.

I want to finish today with a story about four Biblical scholars who were arguing over the various New Testament Bible translations. The first said he preferred the King James Version because of its beautiful, eloquent old English. The second said he preferred the American Standard Bible for its literalism, the way it moves the reader from passage to passage with confident feelings of accuracy from the original text. The third man preferred The Message because of its contemporary, easily understandable use of words, the turn of a phrase that captures the attention of the reader. After giving the issue some serious thought, the fourth scholar claimed, "I prefer my mother's translation." When the other three chuckled, he responded, "Yes, she translated it. She translated each and every page of Jesus' life into reality through her own life, through the power of the Holy Spirit that was in her. And it is the most convincing translation I have ever seen."

Happy Mother's Day, Mom. I love you. Amen.