

## The Good Mother

John Gilmer, at First Presbyterian Church of Wilkes-Barre, May 14, 2023

Today is Mother's Day, as I'm sure most of you have figured out by now. So, of course it is fitting that the message this morning would focus on mothers. Being Christians, now, who do you suppose we should think of when it comes to mothers? How about Mary, Jesus's mother? Yes, there are mothers other than Mary named in the New Testament. There's Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. There's the mother of James and John, and later Eunice, the mother of Timothy. But, we do tend to think of Jesus's mother Mary first. So, today I'm talking about Mary.

I'd like to focus on the relationship between Mary and Jesus. Most of what we have in the Bible about Mary concerns the infancy narratives. In fact, there are only five additional stories where Mary is mentioned. Those are the selections for today's scripture. Most of these will be familiar. But, usually when we read these, we focus on Jesus. That's understandable, and proper. That was the intent of the Evangelists – they are telling the Good News, of God's love, forgiveness, and salvation. But, today, as I read these, I'd like to ask that you think about Mary, and her place and role as Jesus's mother.

May God add understanding and His blessing to the hearing of His Holy Word.

### The Boy Jesus in the Temple

**Luke 2:** <sup>41</sup> Now his [Jesus's] parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; <sup>43</sup> and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup> but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; <sup>45</sup> and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; <sup>47</sup> and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." <sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup> And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

About the situation: Jesus has gone missing. It is a full day of travel before he is missed. This may seem unimaginable in our time. Don't you think you'd notice one of your kids wasn't in the car? But, that wasn't how people traveled back then. They walked, often in a large group. There would have been many travelers returning back to Galilee after the Passover in Jerusalem. Their route was probably from Jerusalem to Jericho, then north along the Jordan river valley to avoid Samaria, then northwest into Galilee. A long first day's travel probably took them to Jericho. Mary and Joseph had trusted Jesus to be there, among their company of travelers. He was twelve years old. That meant he had reached an age of responsibility. He was trusted to do what was right. But, he was missing.

The second day would have seen Mary and Joseph re-climb the steep and difficult road up to Jerusalem. Seventeen miles and 3700 feet up. Think about hiking from Wilkes-Barre up Giant's Despair to Bear Creek, but twice as far and three times the climb. All the way, wondering what has happened to their son Jesus. The third day they look for him in Jerusalem, and find him.

Here we have Mary's words to Jesus: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." Understandable, no? From her perspective, Jesus has failed to live up to his responsibility. But, he is still her son, and she addresses him as such. As a mother would to reassure a wayward child while conveying a message of disappointment.

Jesus replies "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Now, that might have sounded to Mary and Joseph as evasive. But, it's not just Jesus, Joseph and Mary there. Jesus has been participating in the question and answer sessions with the learned men there in the temple, and he had impressed them with his wisdom and knowledge. I expect they had something to tell Mary and Joseph too. Perhaps Jesus had become so wrapped up in those discussions that he forgot his more mundane responsibilities. He may not have even thought of his parents' concerns. It wasn't just Jesus learning. Mary learned more about her son, and from what he had been doing.

We read, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart." Whatever the details of what happened, Jesus was obedient. Was this a learning experience for him? Likely so, if we assume that Jesus, as a human being, had to learn the hard way about things like responsibility, and the concerns of others, just like other people do. Mary was a good mother in helping Jesus learn.

I think of what I was like at twelve years old. In seventh grade, I was supposed to do a Vocabulary List for my junior high Literature class. Twenty five new and unfamiliar words, each with sentence context, definition from the

dictionary, and an example sentence using the word. It seemed overwhelming. I had maybe two or three words of the twenty five words done. When it was due, I didn't turn it in. Time passed. I still didn't turn it in. The teacher sent a note home. I buried it. Eventually the dreaded phone call came. My mother made sure I did that vocabulary list. She had a magazine article on government policy with lots of words I wouldn't know. My mother made sure I learned a lesson about responsibility.

## **The Wedding at Cana**

**John 2:** On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus is now an adult, probably about thirty to thirty five, and is just beginning his ministry. He has called four disciples, Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel. They are there at the wedding feast in Cana, a town just a little over four miles from Nazareth. Mary is there too. A marriage feast, back then, went seven days. It's a big deal. How much wine could a big crowd of wedding guests drink in seven days? We don't know, but more than there was.

Mary comes to Jesus. "They have no wine." That is a statement that a problem exists. She does not tell Jesus what to do. She trusts him to know what to do, and that he will do it.

Jesus is initially evasive. "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." That comes across in English much harsher than it was as spoken. The NRSV version reads, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" Even that isn't quite adequate. In English, addressing someone as "Woman,"

much less your own mother, is rather offensive. It wasn't in Jesus's time and language. I'd read that as "Dear lady, what concern is that to you and to me?"

Jesus is reluctant to act. He says, "My hour has not yet come." Even though he has received the Baptism of John the Baptist, has endured the temptations, and has called some disciples, Jesus is hesitant to perform a miracle. It is a "no turning back" moment. Mary, his mother, seems to understand. She still doesn't tell him what to do. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary may not know what Jesus will do. She is sure Jesus understands the consequences of running out of wine, that is, disgrace for the host and his family. She just trusts that Jesus will, in fact, do what is needed.

I'm reminded, again, of my own dear mother. She agreed to chaperone a sailing trip down the Chesapeake Bay from Annapolis to Little Creek when I was about to graduate. A Nor'easter came up, and we needed to sail into the wind from Little Creek headed back north. It was rough. Down below decks in the cabin everybody was sick from the motion, including my mother. I found out later that she had been praying that the family would be able to get along without her. But she didn't say anything. She trusted me. Not so, one of the other girls on that trip. "Please, oh please, pull into a port! Anywhere!" I couldn't do that. I had to have the boat back Monday morning, a day and a half hence. We just did make it. In the moment of crisis, I didn't understand the depth of my mother's trust in me.

## The True Kindred of Jesus

**Mark 3:** <sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers<sup>[a]</sup> are outside, asking for you." <sup>33</sup> And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

a. [Mark 3:32](#) Other early authorities add *and your sisters*

This incident is difficult to understand. We can't just ignore it. It is the only one of these five stories about Mary that is in all three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. The context is that Jesus is still early in his ministry. He is confronted by authorities with the accusation that his casting out demons is by power given to him by Beelzebul, the Prince of Devils. That is, Satan. This was serious. Jesus was getting into trouble. Furthermore, his brothers do not seem to be counted among the believers. Well, that stands to reason. If a prophet is not

appreciated in his own home town, might that not also apply to members of his own family? Mary was likely caught in the middle. She is concerned for Jesus, his safety, and his mission. She and the brothers want to talk to him. But there is a crowd where he is teaching. Word is sent in to him.

Jesus uses this inquiry as a teaching moment for his disciples. He says, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." The point here is that service to God, our Father in Heaven, must come before all else. Mark and the other evangelists cut the story off there, leaving us with the impression that Jesus completely ignores his mother and brothers. Well, Mark's purpose is to convey Jesus's teaching to the disciples. Not to explore family dynamics. We just can't tell what happened next. I would expect that Jesus would have managed, eventually, to talk to his mother and brothers. But as my Grandfather used to say, "The page is torn off there." We don't really know.

What we do know is that Mary was there. Jesus seemed to be in trouble. Mary may or may not have understood all the reasons. She may not have even understood all of Jesus's teachings. The fact that she was there with Jesus's brothers suggests that she still was living at home, responsible for the rest of the family, rather than following Jesus from place to place. But in his time of need, she was there, trying to help.

I can recall many instances when, in like manner, my mother was there for me when I was in trouble, or hurting, or struggling. (bicycle story?) But also in times of joy.

## **At The Cross**

**John 19: 25b** But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag'dalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Here we see that Mary is there in Jesus's hour of suffering and death. Not at a distance, either. She probably remembered the prophesy at his birth, when Simeon saw the baby Jesus at the Temple, and prophesied:

<sup>34</sup> and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

I am grateful to Luke that this is not the last we read of Mary. Jesus's death on the Cross was not the last word. For, Easter morning, He rose from the dead. His disciples proclaimed, "He is Risen!" He is risen indeed. Jesus made numerous appearances to his followers over the next forty days. Luke records that after he was lifted up to Heaven in the clouds, that the disciples rejoiced. Mary was there with them, too.

### **The Early Church:**

**Acts 1:** <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, ...  
<sup>14</sup> All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

I believe that Mary, on this occasion, received the gift of seeing her son, now raised and lifted up in glory, a fulfilment of what was promised to her. Notice, too, that there is closure here on a wound from the earlier story from Mark. Jesus's brothers are there too. I can't help but think Mary had a lot to do with that, to the benefit and glory of Jesus's brothers. Jesus's brother James later becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church. Also, we have in our Bible an epistle from Jesus's brother Judas.

So, here we have seen, across several scenes, Mary the mother of Jesus being a good mother. She loves Jesus, and does her best to fulfil her responsibilities to him as he is growing up, and supports him fully, as much as she can, during his ministry, even to the cross. What Mary has done is to model, and pass on to Jesus, God's love for her, and for him. In the fullness of time, Jesus taught, and in his suffering showed us, that same love of God for us. For, God is love. As proof, and as a promise of that love for us forever, Jesus was raised from the dead.

A mother's love. Paul describes love this way in I Corinthians 13:

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; <sup>5</sup> it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ... <sup>13</sup> So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Amen.

< [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_CXH4GOUoE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_CXH4GOUoE) >