

**WHY DOES JESUS CALL HIS MOTHER 'WOMAN?'**

My mother loved the Scriptures but she also had certain passages with which she disagreed. She always thought Martha got a bad rap when it came to her and Mary. She thought the world was full of Mary's who liked to sit around and bask in the glow of someone while the remaining hard working few were tasked with doing the heavy lifting. She didn't think the guy who buried his talent should have gotten such a hard time. And she definitely didn't like the fact that the guys who only worked for a few hours got a full day's pay. Didn't seem right to her. And she really didn't like where Jesus refers to his mother as Woman. She told me, after I tried to explain the deeper meaning, that if I ever called her Woman instead of Mother she would blacken my eyes. Point well taken.

"Woman, how does your concern affect me?" "Woman, what to me or thee?" in the old translation. Woman? Why not, Mother? Wouldn't it have worked just as easily? When you just take the passage at face value it does seem a little gruff and distant. One could be forgiven for thinking that Jesus was actually blowing his mother off, as in, "Back off, Mother, This isn't my thing. You don't know what you're asking." Notice, however, that Mary does not respond to Jesus. What she does do is to alert the servants so that when her son acts they will be in harmony with what he asks. She gives them a simple directive: "Do whatever he tells you." Five simple words not directed to him but about him.

In all of these stories there is always more going on than we get at first. So, some background information and context will be helpful. Mary, the mother of Jesus is only mentioned two times in the Gospel of John. Once here at the beginning of the gospel and the other time as her son hangs upon the cross and she stands under it with the beloved disciple. Of note is that in both instances Jesus refers to her as Woman when he could just have easily referred to her as mother. It just raises the question: Why? Some clues as to an answer. First, there is an interesting parallelism with this Gospel and the Old Testament Book of Genesis. They both begin with the same expression: "In the beginning..." Everyone who has read or heard the Book of Genesis is familiar with the account of the creation and the fall. That John's Gospel begins with the exact same words was not accidental. It was a signal. John is about to give an account of the new creation begun in the person and Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, the new Adam.

Second, so who is the new Eve? The new Woman? Woman. I think we all know the answer to that. And with just a few words from this particular woman Jesus will begin the process of unleashing the power of his divinity. He will act in lavish fashion to reveal the depths of God's care and God's love and restore true abundance to our world. The young couple in the story is in a difficult situation. Their plight is real and Jesus deals with it in majestic fashion. At the same time the situation serves as a metaphor for all human beings on earth. Living here there are days in each of our lives when there is no wine (not wine literally) in the sense of there is no grace, no joy. That is why Jesus is here. That is why the Word became flesh—to renew the face of the earth, to be lavish with fallen humanity despite our sins, lavish with his grace and mercy and forgiveness. But there is no magic here. There is no mercy without truth. There is no mercy without our admitting our real sinfulness and then accepting God's mercy.

Mary is the Woman. Jesus calls her that. Mary's last words in all of Scripture are the words we heard a few minutes ago. "Do whatever He tells you." What is Jesus telling us? What is that message? Where is his mercy needed in our world? But then, where is your mercy needed? Today we begin a week of Prayer for Christian Unity? Will you do that? Pray for the day when all Christians will be one and we will all be welcome to receive Eucharist at the Table of the Lord because we will share a common belief that the Lord Jesus is truly and really present here? Will you make it your "thing" to pray for that? Or—this afternoon there will be the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Ecumenical Award Service at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Dr. King was a great man with true vision and generous heart. He was not a perfect man. He had flaws but they paled before his sacrifice. He lay down his own life in the effort to achieve true racial harmony in this country. He died the victim of violence who responded to violence with non-violence even as his Savior did the same. "No greater love..."

Or—on Friday there is the March for Life in Washington. Who will step up to defend the unborn from the scourge that abortion is. If not us, who see, then who will do so? We don't have to do all these things. But we also cannot simply sit in Church and hear of them and simply ignore all of them either. I can't believe that Christ is somehow now content for us to do nothing when he was never content for his apostles to do nothing. Do something. Do what the Lord wants you to do. What is that? The only way we can learn is by asking, by praying. Lord, what do you want me to do? Then, listen. Then. Do. Whatever. He. Tells. You.