

Some of my Jewish friends used to tell what are known as “Jewish princess” and “Jewish prince” jokes, “princess” referring I think to any young Jewish woman, and “prince” referring to a son in the family. The only *princess* story I remember is, “What is a Jewish princess’s favorite wine?” “I want to go to Hawaii!” A typical Jewish prince story would be, “How many Jewish princes does it take to change a light bulb?” None; “It’s OK sonny, I’ll read in the dark.”

But truthfully, I cannot believe that any good son, Jewish or Gentile, no matter how spoiled, even by an “Affluenza mom,” would ever say to his mother what a good Jewish boy of 2000 years ago said to his, “Woman” — can any of you imagine addressing or having addressed your mother that way; I would not have been “smacked,” but I would have been grounded — “*Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?*”

Yet that is what Jesus said to Mary — or was it to Mary — in our Gospel reading today, though he goes on to say, “*My hour has not yet come,*” though that sounds strangely like, “I’ll get around to it when I care to do so.”

Although we read from the Gospel of John every year, it is usually in snippets, like this, and we fail to see any pattern in what the writer of that Gospel has presented. And though it is generally agreed that *in the form in which we read it*, it is the last written of the four *canonical* versions of the Good News of Jesus Christ, its writer’s theology certainly influenced writers of other parts of the New Testament, specifically the writer or writers — who may or may not have been the writer of the Gospel — of the letters, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the writer — who almost certainly was *not* the same writer, but a follower of the writer of John — the writer of Revelation.

And like Revelation, the Gospel of John is filled with *imagery* that is not always obvious — including *perhaps* the “*mother of Jesus.*” No name is given in John for “the mother of Jesus,” who does not appear again in John until Jesus is on the cross, when he says, “*Woman, here is your son,*”¹ referring to the one the writer refers to as “the disciple

¹ John 19:26c (NRSV)

Jesus loved,” but who otherwise is unnamed as well. (Though this disciple is the person whom the writer credits as his written source for what is in this version of the Good News.)

There has apparently been a tremendous amount written arguing about whether by “the mother of Jesus,” the writer of John means a specific person, Mary, the traditional, or early tradition, Roman Catholic position, or whether the writer is using that *imagery* to which I referred earlier when he — and I am relatively confident that “he” is correct — uses the term, *mother of Jesus*. Such imagery is what appears in our Old Testament lesson:

Like a young man marrying a virgin, your rebuilder will wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.²

God as groom and Israel as the bride is a common image in the Old Testament, which makes me think that too often I have overlooked the significance of the fact that, in today’s passage, the *mother of Jesus* is not named. I have usually just referred to this passage when doing weddings by saying, “And according to the Gospel of John, Jesus’ first miracle was at the wedding in Cana.”

And indeed, the writer gives the incident described that significance — or does he; — it is the first *sign*; the signs by which we are to recognize who Jesus is.

But I think I have missed a lot, and while you might have understood the point I am going to make from the first, please humor me by playing along: In this story, we are to see *ourselves* in the role of the mother of Jesus in this story, but that role will only become clear when we consider those words from the cross, “Woman, here is your son.”

² Isaiah 62:5 (NJB)

For as we see from Isaiah, *it is not the gender role that is important here*. Isaiah was referring to an entire nation with the feminine, *bride*, and many of us will remember we had no trouble singing the old hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation,” *The church’s one foundation / is Jesus Christ her Lord: / She is His new creation / By water and the word./ From heaven he came and sought her / To be His Holy bride / With His own blood He bought her / And for her life he died.*

I mention that as well as Isaiah to support the point that we should not get hung up on gender when trying to understand what the Bible might be trying to tell us, and so let us put ourselves in the role of “the mother of Jesus,” but not at the wedding at Cana, at the cross, and let me ask, do you think Jesus is perhaps saying, “Church — Christians — you and me together and individually — here are your children”?

There is a theological, or perhaps, ecclesiological, application that goes with understanding “mother” to refer to the *church*, both small “c” and large “C,” and also a very real and tangible application of how we should accept this challenge to be “mothers,” — OK, as a former steel mill worker, I think I would feel safer and less likely to slip, if I use “parent” or “parents,” — “parents, here is your child, here are your children!”

Two applications, but both important and neither of which we can ignore.

Let me take the second first, the practical and tangible. It raises the old question we would hear on local TV around curfew time: “Parents, where are your children?” Well, it is a sensitive and sometimes painful matter, and more than one of you has expressed concern about the way in which grandchildren or great-grandchildren are being raised, but much as we might want to ignore it, millions of children are *not* in a very good place. Multiply our concerns about children we know by, I don’t know, perhaps a million or more, maybe ten million or more, and you have the number of children in this country who are essentially *parentless children*, even with the presence of at least one parent in the child’s life. There are multiple causes: one or more drug addicted parents, parent or

parents who themselves are really children emotionally if not in terms of knowledge and responsibility, mental illness, growing up with no role models for themselves as parents — which of course will be visited upon the child or children, — and children born out of wedlock to children born out of wedlock, leading without intervention to a repeat of the same problem of, effectively, *parentless* children in yet another generation.

It seems hopeless, and can be overwhelming, yet I cannot believe Jesus would want this to continue as it does, or would want us to stand around claiming to be his followers while being indifferent to the plight of such parentless children.

Yet, what can we do? And there are no easy answers. Here, in Arizona, and I think we are not that different from most states in the Union, I do not know about our neighbor on the north, we had a virtual — no, not *virtual*, *real* — scandal because Child Protective Services was not handling all the cases assigned to them — and they were mainly cases of abuse, not of the larger population of children who were not receiving the love, affection, discipline, and, not just adequate nutrition, but *nurture*, and the learning opportunities we all want or wanted for our own children. The situation is arguably improved over the past two years, though case loads apparently have not, but I am not suggesting there is an easy answer, and most certainly government *alone* is not the answer.

No, even if government might be a part of the answer, we cannot play Pontius Pilate and wash our hands of the plight of these parentless children, for “Woman, here is your child” or “Church, believers, here are your children,” is addressed to us, not to some faceless entity we minimally — and begrudgingly — support with our taxes.

I have no specific ideas; I challenge you: if we really want to accept Jesus’ charge from the cross, let us find ways to help as we consider what is the mission of Christ’s Church.

Which brings me, though, to the first application, the theological or ecclesiological application, of “Church, believers, here are your children,” for though it is a very long

term solution, I believe there are ways in which we can work to parent both the society in which this sadness occurs, and the parentless children growing up within it. And here, quite frankly, I am taking a swat at those efforts that try to substitute easy “Sunday-worship-only church” for commitment to Christ, which requires taking on the role of being followers of Christ, which is what we are called from His cross to be. I like worship here; I enjoy leading worship here; but if we all leave saying, “That was nice; I think I’ll come next Sunday, too,” [George and Nancy]/[Carolyn and Rose] and I have been failures. Failures, because a major function of worship is to help provide us the energy to reach out to those parentless children, to reach out to them by helping inadequate parents to *know* the love of God, to experience through us the love of God, so that they can give that love to those children who otherwise might never know it. And we must seek to find how we as a church and how we as followers can involve our work in the world, our *mission* work, to help provide an opportunity for these parentless children.

Again, I have no specifics, but I challenge you, if we really want to accept Jesus’ charge from the cross, I believe that a major reason for celebrating the Word in worship is to equip us to take the *Word* into the world, to be Christ outside this room. And *Word*, by the way, is an expression we learn from this same Gospel according to John that we are discussing.

We can drink wine at the wedding, drink coffee at Fellowship, but as we leave, let us remember not the words at the wedding, “Woman, what concern is that of mine,” but rather let us think of ourselves as leaving the cross, for Jesus’ *hour* has indeed come. Let us leave here today accepting the charge, “Church, people, *all of these* are your children!”

In Jesus’ name, let it be so, which is what we mean by, Amen.