

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
The Midweek Liturgy, Wednesday, January 3, 2024
Matthew 12:46-50
The True Mother, Sister, and Brother of Jesus

HOLY GOSPELMatthew 12:46-50, RSV
Last week Jesus spoke of the “sign of the prophet Jonah.” Now he speaks of his true mother, brothers, and sisters.

⁴⁶While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When it comes to being friends with Jesus, even Mary, his mother, does not have an advantage over us. And that is quite a thought. Maybe I have overstated it somewhat, and yet I think there is truth in my idea, and it is a glorious truth for us. I also think that it is a truth that Mary herself approves of.

This passage is like the one in John Chapter 2 in that Jesus seems to be a bit rough on his mother. In John 2, his mother points out to Jesus that the wedding party has run out of wine, and Jesus give her what seems to me to be a harsh answer:

⁴And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4, RSV)

What does Jesus mean in asking Mary, “What have you to do with me?” Mary is his mother! She has much to do with him.

Likewise, in this evening’s reading, when Jesus hears that his mother and his brothers are asking to speak with him, he gives the surprising answer:

“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”

It sounds as if Jesus is distancing himself from Mary and his brothers. Perhaps Jesus is troubled that Mary has interrupted his words to the people. That is what Matthew reports:

⁴⁶While he was *still speaking* to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. (Matthew 12:46, RSV)

Jesus might have thought to himself, "Souls are at stake here. I am speaking to the people, trying to save them. And Mary has interrupted my work."

So, it appears to me that from time to time, Jesus is a bit rough on his mother.

On the other hand, Mary seems to take things in stride. She does not seem to take offense at the rough words of her son. In fact, the rough words of Jesus at the wedding at Cana become the occasion for one of the great sayings in the Bible. When Jesus says to Mary, "What have you to do with me," Mary simply turns to the servants and says:

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. (John 2:5, KJV)

This is always the great instruction for any of us. Whatever Jesus says to us to do, up and do it. So, Mary does not seem troubled by the rough words of Jesus.

And it is clear that Jesus loved his mother. One of the last things he did in his earthly life was to arrange for the care of his mother after his death. He fought through the pain and suffocation of crucifixion to entrust his mother to his disciple John (John 19:27).

Let us conclude then that in this evening's passage, Jesus is not rejecting or condemning his mother. He does not say, "Mary is not my mother. And those with her are not my brothers." He does not go that far, glad to say. Instead, let us focus on the positive thing he did say, for it is a glorious saying:

⁴⁹And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:49-50, RSV)

Oh! How noble is piety! Why, it has the power to render us children of God and kin to Jesus himself. You and I might think we are nothing special. We might be among the quiet ones on earth. We might think that few people take note of us, and we might be right in that idea. And yet if we walk with Jesus, Jesus one day is going to greet us in heaven by throwing his arms around us and announcing to the heavenly host, "Here is my brother! Here is my sister! Here is my mother! Receive this one with honor!"

And so it is that you and I can place ourselves among those disciples gathered around Jesus when he is told that Mary seeks to see him. He gazes around at his followers, including you and me, and says the great words:

“Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Well done, Sister Carol, well done Sister Lara, and well done you brothers and sisters in the Lord in this congregation. You are the very children of God and kin to Jesus, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.