



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

## Mother Knows Best John 2:1-11; I Corinthians 12:1-11

That Mary! She was the quintessential Jewish mother, believing that her boy was the best and could do anything. And I am certain, that like most proud mothers, she let other folks know how special her son was. Over the holidays, Deborah and I were strolled into a greeting card store. While she looked for a bargain on a potential gift for our granddaughter, I browsed the marked down greeting cards. I noticed one that had a cartoon drawing on the cover and looked as if it was set in biblical times. I pulled it out of the rack and, sure enough, it was a cartoon with Jerusalem in the background. In the foreground were three donkeys, each with a Jewish lady on its back. On the rear of each donkey was a bumper sticker. The first one boasted, "Our son is a doctor." The second one crowed, "Our son is a lawyer." And the third one simply stated, "Our son is God!" You can guess who was riding that donkey!

That Mary. She was proud of her son. She often remembered the night he was born amid all of the anxiety of finding a room, the humiliation of giving birth in a stable, and the surprise of shepherds arriving to welcome their baby boy. The angel's words often floated through her memory, reminding her that the rather ordinary young man who worked beside his father was supposed to be the Messiah. In thirty years of life, however, he had rarely hinted at his spiritual destiny. Then a few months ago, he had gone down to the Jordan with some of the other people from their village to be baptized by his cousin John. Afterward, he retreated to the wilderness for over a month and then gathered a number of young men and began teaching them. Up until that point, she had never felt that his time had arrived or that there was anything really special about him, other than, of course, his being the smartest, wittiest, handsomest, most eloquent man in the village. But then she would have felt that way whether he was the Son of God or not!

That Mary. Like any mother, she felt that she knew what was best for her son. She had always guided him gently. He was, after all, rather strong-willed himself. Generally she knew his strengths and needs and he often chose to do the things she would have suggested anyway. Today felt

different for some reason. Today felt like a big change was about to take place. Today Mary had the sense that Jesus' time had come.

She overheard some of the servants arguing about the wine. Apparently someone had not adequately prepared for the wedding feast and the wine had run out. Knowing that such a mistake would be a huge embarrassment to the family and perhaps mean the loss of his job for the chief steward, Mary went to her son and said, "They have no wine." Jesus stepped away from his disciples and said respectfully, "What concern is that to you and me?" And when he saw the look on her face and the light in her eyes, he added, with some hesitation, "My hour has not yet come." Without responding to him, Mary turned to the servants who had followed her and said, "Do whatever he tells you." They looked at Jesus. Jesus looked at them. Jesus looked at his mother. He looked around the courtyard and saw six large jars for purification. "Fill the jars with water," he said, and turned back to his disciples. When the servants returned to tell him that they had fulfilled his command, he instructed them to draw some out of the jars and take it to the chief steward who discovered that it was far better wine than he had served when the feast began. He commented to the puzzled bridegroom that he was surprised the finest wine had been served late in the feast, but I suspect Mary, standing nearby, smiled to herself and wiped a tear from her eye.

That Mary, like all mothers, she knew when it was time to let her child go and live into the life God had dreamed for him. She had raised him well, taught him, encouraged him, and made certain he allowed all of his gifts to flourish. Now it was time for him to put them to use. His hour had come.

Most mothers (and fathers) are like Mary, seeing the best in their children and working hard to bring out the best in them. Some aren't always successful, but most mothers do see in their children what the children do not always see in themselves. Often mothers do know what is best for their children even if they have to hold their tongues and keep that knowledge to themselves.

Spiritually, the church is our mother. Often likened to the Bride of Christ, the Church welcomes us into the family of God, nurtures us, and calls us to use our gifts and talents for the ministry of the church and the sake of God's kingdom.

While it was my grandmother who first mentioned to me the possibility of becoming a minister, it was my entire home church which recognized my gifts, helped me develop them, and encouraged me all along the way. Sunday School teachers taught me about the Bible, its meaning, and purpose. Choir leaders shaped my understanding of worship and the importance of singing our faith. Our youth minister taught us how to think critically about the Bible and faith and how to share our faith through music and missions. My pastor modeled for me how to care for other people in all stages of life and allowed me opportunities to minister in my home church. People prayed for me, encouraged me, and affirmed me at every turn. Long before I understood my call to ministry, the people in my church, my spiritual mother, knew what was best for me.

I have seen it over and over through the years, the church nurtures her people and then calls them into service. Most of the time it is a call to use particular talents and abilities within the ministry of the church. So we ask you to teach Sunday School or work with children, youth, or adults. We seek your expertise on committees so that the ministry of the church may go forward. We ask you to add your skills to mission projects and your insight to special activities. We invite you to lead in worship by singing, praying, reading, ushering, or offering hospitality to all who come. We ask you to pray, to visit, to comfort, to encourage, to give, and to share so that the Good News of the Gospel has an opportunity to be experienced by us and everyone around us.

I sometimes like to joke with our deacons and remind them that when it was time to find someone to replace Judas as one of the Apostles, they had two people cast lots for the honor. I call it “gambling with the Gospel” since, after all, God is placing this ministry in the hands of mere mortals. The truth is that far from taking a gamble on anyone who will agree to lead in our church, we zero in on your interests, abilities, and willingness to serve when we ask you to do a particular job in the church. You are chosen because of who you are and our impression of how God can use you in a particular way.

One thing I like about our congregation is its diversity. Granted, in many ways we are very much alike and there is plenty of room for greater diversity. Nevertheless, we are a group of people with a wide range of interests, experiences, and dreams. Our family backgrounds vary as do our educational and career paths. Even our religious backgrounds are quite diverse. There is a broad range of skills, abilities, and talents in this congregation. Together we know a great deal about a lot of things. That is why we work together so well and why our decisions are well thought out and

intentional. So when we ask someone to take on a particular aspect of our ministry, we know they have what it takes to do that task. When we ask, we know the person has something special to share.

As he helped the Christians in Corinth figure out what it was going to mean to be a church, a fellowship of believers, the Apostle Paul explained to them that God has this wild idea to take people with a variety of skills, interests, and concerns and shape them into a caring family of faith. He explained that God calls each of us to do different things at different times according to what is needed in the church. It is important that each one of us respond to that call in order for the full ministry of the church to be accomplished. If any one of us fails to follow through with our commitment, we put the entire ministry at risk of failing to fulfill God's call of us.

I am certain that even Mary knew the areas that were not Jesus' strong suit, but she never stopped believing in his capabilities. So when it was time to signal to the world who he was, Mary nudged him forward, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary knew best.

As a congregation, we know each other well. We know our needs and who among us can best meet those needs. That is why we ask you to teach and sing and lead. It is why we ask for your expertise on committees and for your help around the church. It is why we depend upon your generosity of time, talent, and money. The wonderful diversity of our congregation is why we choose certain ones from among us to serve us as deacons. We have confidence in you. We respect you. We trust you. We love you. Like Mary, the church knows her children and who will serve well. So we nudge and prod and ask and call. Like Jesus, may we each recognize wisdom speaking and offer ourselves as a sign of God's grace in the world. Amen!

January 17, 2016

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Gracious God, in the often frantic pace of our days, we sometimes forget to stop to thank you for all that is good in our lives. Our blessings are many and our hearts are filled with gratitude for the gift of living, for the ability to love and be loved, for the opportunity to see the wonders of creation and the beauty and variety of the people around us, for work and play and rest, for minds that create and analyze, bodies that move and function and hearts that dream and feel. In the silence of our souls, we thank you most of all for your unconditional and eternal love revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Even as this week our celebrations will honor Dr. King's efforts to heal divisions in our land, teach us, O God, to build new bridges and cross new divides within this community. Help us to look beyond race and language, creed and culture, status and party, and whatever labels we use to separate ourselves from one another to see other hearts beating with hope and promise, other faces which reflect your image. Help us to see the diversity and variety you have created not as reasons for suspicion or judgment but as opportunities for seeking understanding and appreciating the unique gifts and perspectives of each person we encounter. Teach us to reach out beyond these walls to ease the suffering that engulfs so many lives. Grant us wisdom and courage to face the complexities of our world and to seek solutions with creativity and mercy. Give us grace as we struggle with our often competing responsibilities of seeking change where it is needed and peace where it is possible. Help us to be a people of compassion and to respond to those in need out of the abundance we have received from you. Teach us to be merciful even as we have been shown great mercy.

We also thank you on this day, O God, for these our brothers and sisters whom we have called out from among us and who have answered that call to serve. Through the working of your Holy Spirit, give them grace and power to fulfill their ministry. Make them faithful in their service and constant in advancing your gospel in the world. May they follow the example of Jesus, who washed the feet of his disciples and set the needs of others before his own. Indeed, this is our prayer not only for these whom we have called as deacons but for each of us and all of us who call ourselves your disciples. Great God of Heaven, be our vision, our wisdom, our greatest treasure, and our highest joy, now and always. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power of your Holy Spirit we seek your grace and we offer our prayers. Amen.

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