

Matthew 12:46-50

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.' But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

“Momma Mia; Who is My Mother?”

Rev. Charles Schuster

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Sue Monk Kidd in her book, *The Secret Life of Bees*, there's a section in this book that talks about the black virgin Mary. It's set in the south, in South Carolina, and there is this statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, black and in chains. "When everything had quieted down, August said, 'Now, the oldest of the slaves was a woman named Pearl, and she walked with a stick, and when she spoke, everybody listened. She got to her feet and said, 'This here is the mother of Jesus.'" And everybody knew the mother of Jesus was named Mary, and that she'd seen suffering of every kind, and that she was strong and constant and had a mother's heart. And here she was, sent to them on the same waters that had brought them there in chains. It seemed to them she knew everything they suffered. I stared at that statue, feeling the fractured place in my heart, and so,' August said, 'people cried and danced and clapped their hands and went one at a time and touched their hands to her chest, wanting to grab onto the solace in her heart. They did this every Sunday in the praise house, dancing and touching her chest, and eventually they painted a red heart on her breast so the people would have a heart to touch. Our Lady filled their hearts with fearlessness and whispered to them plans of escape. The bold ones fled, finding their way north, and those who didn't, lived with raised fists in their hearts, and if they ever grew weak, they would only have to touch her heart again. She grew so powerful, she became known even to the master, and one day he hauled her off on the wagon and chained her in his carriage house, but then without any human help she escaped during the night, and made her way back to the praise house. The master chained her in the barn fifty times, and fifty times, she loosed those chains and went home. And finally he gave up and let her stay there.' And the room grew quiet, and August stood there for a moment, letting everything sink in. When she spoke again, she raised her arms out beside her. 'The people called her Our Lady of Chains. They called her that not because she wore chains,'.. "Not because she wore chains," the daughters chanted... 'They called her the Lady of Chains because she broke them.' "

12th chapter of the Gospel of Mark. (I'm sorry, Matthew. I'm not sorry about the Gospel of Mark, but his is in the Gospel of Matthew.) 46th verse: "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him, but he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"

In your bulletin you have that insert that is the questionnaire that we use for the Worship Committee and the church staff, and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. We'd appreciate your insights. We listen to those, we read those, we listen to those and ponder. And there's a big box back there in the narthex, if you want to fill that out with your thoughts. You don't have to sign it. We're not going to do any graphology and find out who wrote what. We just need your input. We appreciate it very much, and thank you for the ones who responded last week. This will be the last time they're in.

Sue Monk Kidd wrote in *The Secret Life of Bees* these words. "You have to find the mother inside you. We all do. Even if we've already got a mother, we still have to find that part in ourselves inside, the feminine side of ourselves. The feminine side of God. This is one strange sermon, and it goes to a very strange point, freaking me out as I wrote it, even as I speak it. I'm not sure I understand it, and I apologize in advance for it. Blame it on the Holy Spirit. Blame it on the fact that I haven't preached since Easter. And the Personnel Committee meets Tuesday night.

It's got to be somewhat true that there's something very wrong about a father preaching a sermon on Mothers Day, first of all. When Bob Gibson was pitching for the Saint Louis Cardinals, Tim McCarver was the catcher. Tim McCarver said, "He's one of the meanest people I ever met. He'd like to throw at people's heads just for the heck of it, and somebody asked him once, 'If your mother came up to bat, would you try to hit her in the head?' and he said, 'Yes, if she crowded the plate.'" In one game, Gibson walked two batters and McCarver, the catcher, walked out to the mound to kind of settle him down. Before he could open his mouth, Gibson looked down at his catcher, at McCarver, and snarled, and said, "The only thing you know about pitching is, you can't hit it, keep your mouth shut."

There's something wrong about a father preaching a sermon on Mothers Day, it's like the story King Duncan tells. It's a good story about a mother and a four-year old, and they're out in the park, and the child reaches down and picks something off the ground, starts to put it in her mouth. Her mother took it away and said, 'Don't do that, it's been on the ground, it's full of germs, it'll make you sick.' The four-year-old looked up at her mom and said, 'How do you know all that stuff? You're so smart.' And she answered, 'All moms know this stuff. It's on the Moms' Test. You have to know it or they don't let you be a mom.' There was a long pause and finally the little child thought it through and looked up at her mother one more time and said, 'I get it. And if you don't pass the test, you have to be the Daddy.'

There's something very wrong about a dad preaching a sermon on Mothers Day, but I'll do it, even if I haven't passed the test. Seems important, as we think about our mothers on this day of mothers, to think about Jesus and his, to try to gain some insight, maybe read between the lines, what's being said, about him, about her, about them. It doesn't take much living to learn that life comes at us in sequence, in stages, and sometimes you can't even see the present until you get to the future. As William Faulkner said, "The past is never dead. The past is not even past." There comes a time in our lives when it's all about us, and there's a mother present, and we're saying to her, "Mama, look at me." And it's a

story well known and told often by preachers, they lost him in the city, he was twelve, they found him the temple, Mary found him. She may have heard him backing up the theologians into their intellectual corners. She may have seen him hitting hard the hierarchy with his wit, exposing hypocrisy of their alleged holiness. She may have realized they were amazed, she may have been amazed herself. “Mama, look at me. I’m doing God’s work, don’t you know? You thought I was lost. I’m sorry you were worried, but don’t need to worry about me. Mama, look at me, I’m doing God’s work.”

Mama, look at me. Peanuts cartoon. Linus has this security blanket. Speaking to Charlie Brown, “When I hear the coyotes out there at night, I get real tense, and it makes me real scared, and I feel lonely.” And Charlie Brown says to him, “I though holding onto that security blanket made you secure?” And Linus replies, “I think the warranty on my blanket has run out.” When our security blankets warranty wears out, we say it, “Mama, look at me.” It was in the temple for Jesus; it could have been at the swimming pool on a dive from the high board that was a cannonball that splashed the unsuspecting. “Mama, look at me.” It could have been a concert hall, and a twelve-year-old sitting behind a piano bigger than a bus, trying to shorten that yawning distance between Beethoven and banging on the keys. Could have been at a baseball game in right field when the ball came so fast and so hard that it wasn’t skill that allowed for the catch, it was self-defense. “Mama, look at me.”

Theologian Sue Monk Kidd, in *The Secret Life of Bees*, the statue of the black Mary, chains around her neck and people cried and danced and clapped their hands, and they went to touch their hands to her chest, and she filled their hearts with fearlessness and they called her Our Lady of the Chains, not because she wore the chains, but because she broke the chains. She broke the chains of our self-doubt, the chains of our fear. “Mama, look at me.” We celebrate the supportive presence in our life, our mother, a mother figure, she stood at the curb and watched us march, she sat in the bleachers and clapped, and she listened to our speeches and told us we were good. “Mama, look at me.” The comfort of a mama, I hope you had it.

The confrontation of a mama, the other stage we remember. The past is never dead, the past is not even the past. “Mama, let me be.” It happened to Jesus, he was thirty, there was a wedding that couldn’t have been, it wouldn’t have been, if you know anything about human nature, it wasn’t the first time this sort of thing had happened. She wanted him to do something. She needed it to be done. She wanted him to get on with his life, she thought it was time. “Turn the water into wine,” she said. “Get it done, Son, you can do it,” she said. And he said to her, “What have you to do with me? Mama, let it be.” I expect every one of us has had times like these. She thought we could do more than we thought we could do. She thought we had more time to do it than we had. She told us to write the thank-you note for the gift that we didn’t even like when we got it. She told us to clean up our room - we thought we already had. She told us to clean up our act, and we thought our act was just fine. She told us to do something we thought we didn’t need to do. She pushed. She pushed.

Joe Coffin remembers talking to a student, when he was a chaplain at Yale one day, and the student said to him, "I had a terrible childhood. Just awful. My mother understood me." I hope we all had somebody to push us when we didn't want to be pushed. I'll bet many of us count our mothers as one who provided the up-against-ness that we needed sometimes. Emily Dickinson is right when she says that which oppresses us - and sometime our mamas did - that which oppresses us forms the fabric of life that maintains us within it."

Mama, let me be. What do you mean, I need to listen to the words I speak? I need to look at the life I live? I need to think about the thoughts I have. Mama, let me be. Confronting mother's push. Confronting mothers give us the up-against-ness, and it isn't always friendly and it isn't always nice. Why does she do it? What are her motives? Mama, let me be. The up-against-ness. I hope we all had somebody who confronted us, as well as gave us comfort.

Life is a tension between being pushed and being held. And there comes a time when we become confident. Maslow calls it self-actualization. We become busy, caught up. She steps back, a bit. She watches us and we may not know she's watching because we don't really care. We don't know, because we don't need her to watch us, and down deep in her heart, she knows this is how it is, and her purpose in life is fulfilled, as she watches. We don't raise our children to keep them ours or to tie them to us. There was that time in Jesus' life, he was full of himself, and he was preaching a sermon, and the people were listening, and I'll bet the offering was being taken up, and he was so pleased. Doing what he was sent out to do, at that time in his life when he was there, and she came, and they told him, "Your mama's there," and he said, "Who's my mama?" Probably not such a good time to be interrupted. How proud his mother must have been. "Don't you seem Mama, don't you see, I'm busy now. My mama's here? Who's my mama?"

Did you see Calvin Borel, did you see Calvin Bo-rail, they call him, a jockey on a horse, Kentucky Derby, last Saturday, Mine That Bird, fifty to one odds, no way that horse is going to win. Calvin Bo-rail liked to ride his horses on the rail, took that horse right up the rail. Did you see that? Oh, my goodness. Mine That Bird ran right up the rail and won, and it hit him as he crossed the finish line, his mother died this year and his father four years ago. "My parents, if they could see me now, what I've done with my life, how proud they would have been." "Mama, don't you see I'm busy now. Who is my mother?" I hope your mother gets to see what you've done with your life. Well, she won't be a part of it, but she'll be proud of it, when you do what you will do, and she will get to see what you're busy doing. It doesn't get any better than that. A comforting mom, a confronting mom, it doesn't get any better than a mom who sees her son or her daughter a confident child, because the purpose of a mother is a confident child. It doesn't get any better than that.

Yes it does. The best it ever gets, when "Who is my mother?" becomes "Behold my mother." It takes a lifetime, and sometimes even more, but we move toward it, because it's part of it. The past is never over, in fact the past is never past. Jesus was too busy for his mother. "Who is my mother?" But before he died, he learned it. He learned it. Maybe

it was that he began to take a good look at himself, when he started to look at what he had become. Maybe that's the reason. Golda Meir was right, she said, "Don't be so humble. You're not that great." Mama mia, behold my mother. Maybe it's true what George Bernard Shaw said - "Everything happens to everybody, sooner or later, if there's enough time." It happened to Jesus after he thought of what he's said, "Who is my mother?" "Behold my mother." Mama, I can see. I can see now why you did the things you did, and I didn't know it at the time. I can see strength in your character, when all I saw at the time was stubborn pride. I can see what you would have been, if the culture would have let you. I can see what you've become in spite of all that worked against you. He saw it from the cross. Sometimes, that's what it takes to see people as they are. If it hadn't been for Mary, Jesus would have died alone. If it hadn't been for women storytellers, we wouldn't have had the New Testament. If it hadn't been for little old ladies in the Soviet Union, the Communists would still be in charge, and there'd be no church in Russia. If it hadn't been for the mothers of Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants would still be killing each other as if it were a team sport. "Behold my mother." Jesus saw it. He saw the feminine side of God in his mom. He may have remembered those words in Genesis, "We were made in the image of God, male and female is the image of God." Jesus saw it. Lots of us men never do. Sometimes women can't either. The feminine side of God. Sometimes, you've just got to be on a cross to see it. Happy Mothers Day.