

MOTHER MARY SAYS TO US ...

Sermon, January 20, 2018

Text: Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11

"When I find myself in times of trouble, mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, 'Let it be.' And in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, 'Let it be.' Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be. Whisper words of wisdom, 'Let it be.' "

For those who may not know, those are lyrics from a song by the Beatles entitled "Let It Be", written by Paul McCartney, and released in March 1970. It was the final single released by the Beatles while the band was still intact, and it immediately shot to the top of the charts throughout the Western world. A little known fact, however, is that Sir Paul was NOT referring to Mary, mother of Jesus. The song was inspired by Mary, mother of Paul. Mary McCartney died of cancer when Paul was a teenager of fourteen. In an interview, McCartney recounted that "Let It Be" was inspired by a dream he had about his mother during a very tense period for the band: George Harrison had stormed out of a recent recording session, John Lennon was becoming increasingly reclusive and odd, John's lady friend Yoko Ono was driving all of them a little batty, and Ringo had just about given up on the band altogether. It was during this tumultuous time Paul had the dream, and in the dream his departed mother told him, "*It will be all right, Paul, just ... let it be.*" In an earlier interview McCartney had said, "*It was great to visit with her again. I felt very blessed to have that dream.*"¹

Paul McCartney may not have meant to do so, but he profoundly captured the essence of all Christendom's admiration of Mary the mother of Jesus, which probably accounted (*although a bit mistakenly*) for a large part of the song's popularity. Christendom has long admired this young woman named Mary who said those three little words "*Let it be*" to the angel of the Lord when informed she would bear the son of the Most High. Luke 1:38 -- "*Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; LET IT BE to me according to your word.*" Three little words, so simple and yet so complex. For Mary, they are her response of faithfulness to God. These words represent her trust in crisis, her willingness to believe what is not really comprehensible or comprehensible, and her readiness to be used in risky and sometimes painful ways simply in response to God's request. These three little words changed not only her life, but literally changed the life of the world.

During the service for our dearly departed friend Evelyn Rae on Friday, I told the story how in September 1962 they had moved to Seekonk and got involved with the Seekonk Alliance Church, in Evelyn's handwritten words (*included among her pre-written instructions for her funeral service*), it was there she and George came to know JESUS AS THEIR LORD AND SAVIOR. (*She wrote in all capital letters long before the days of "texting", where all caps implies SHOUTING, but the intent is the same!*). She really wanted people to know that; it always struck her as ironic that so many people, like her up until that point, could be raised in the church all their lives yet never come to the realization this is a decision with which each and every person needs to come to grips and act upon ... IS Jesus your Lord and your Savior? Then live accordingly!

I also made mention in the homily of one Advent sermon I preached in 2007 that earned me high praises from her, with her Greek Orthodox background. I pointed out in that sermon that the term "Theotokos" was coined by the Eastern Orthodox church for mother Mary. The term was designed to clarify the rather fine theological point that Mary wasn't actually the *mother* of God, she was the *bearer* of God. Yes, in an earthly sense, she was the mother of Jesus, she carried Him in her womb, and she delivered Him into her world ... but the Orthodox church takes pains to clarify that Jesus, being eternal God, doesn't have a "mother." Mary is simply the *bearer*, the "tokos", the one through whom the Son of God would enter her world. She faithfully and literally carried the Savior into her world. And that's a role, by the way, we are all called to perform. At the root of the Christmas message is that we share something in common with Mary, if indeed the Holy Spirit of God has conceived the life of the Son of God in our hearts and lives. The grand mystery and privilege of being Christian is that we have the divinely-conceived life of Christ within *us*. We "bear" the Prince of Peace within our hearts and souls. And we are called to faithfully *bring* that Life within us into our worlds. We are the vessels through which the life of Jesus Christ enters our world today. In this sense, Evelyn really was a faithful **Theotokos** ... not to put her (*or any of us*) on a par with Mary, but Evelyn lovingly and passionately brought the life of Jesus Christ within her into our world throughout her life in her unique way ... as we are all called to do.

As the sermon title intimates, there was something else mother Mary said besides "Let it Be." She said that to an angel; what does mother Mary say to us? In fact, there are all together only four occasions when Mary's words are recorded in the entire Bible, and only in the Gospels of Luke and John; Matthew and Mark don't quote her at all. I already mentioned the first time, and that was when she dialogues with the angel during what the theologians call the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38). The second time Mary's words are recorded is later in the same chapter, in her encounter with Elizabeth when she sings her Magnificat, "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant, and from now on all generations will call me blessed ...*". The third time her words are recorded is when she spoke to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple after frantically trying to find him for three days, "*Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you!*" Jesus replied, as if to gently remind his mother that though Joseph may have played the parental rearing role of earthly father, His real Father knew exactly

¹ See <https://www.radiox.co.uk/artists/beatles/let-it-be-meaning-story-lyrics> which also is a delightful video of "Carpool Karaoke" with British host James Corden

where He was all along: *"Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's house?" (Lk 2:41-52)*. And the fourth time is what we read earlier; John tells us what Mary said to some servants at this wedding. Why would that seemingly simple comment be so significant as to be included in the Bible along with only three other significant utterances of Mother Mary?

We confess in the Apostles' Creed, *"On the third day He ..."* what? *"He rose again from the dead."* Which is a remarkable tenet of our faith. However, according to the Gospel of John, on the third day He ... went to a wedding. What's so remarkable about that, John? In the way John has constructed his Gospel, on the third day of Jesus' public ministry He chooses to show up with His disciples at a wedding, as recorded in John 2:1. Jesus doesn't go to the power center in Jerusalem to launch His ministry; He goes to a little ordinary, backwater town in Israel to a wedding celebration, a place where there is eating, and drinking, and dancing, a place where people are enjoying each other's company and celebrating the establishment of a new family, where a man and a woman are pledging themselves to "Beulah Land" for life.² All these things were going on at this wedding in Cana where the guests didn't realize that God was right there with them, in the midst of their present moment, entering into the activities of their everyday lives. Mother Mary is there, Jesus friends are with Him. And then Mary comes up to Jesus and says, *"They have no more wine."*

Now, we don't know. Maybe she expected a miracle from Him. Or maybe, she just wanted Him to run to the Cana liquor store (*after all, He brought all His disciples with Him, so they all should chip in their fair share!*). Or maybe she was simply telling Him the way it is: the wine has run out, and when the wine runs out, the reception will be over ... the "happy moment" is about to be end, and it will soon be time for all of these now happy folks to go back home ... back to life, back to whatever season of life it is at their homes with all the attendant problems that may be going on there. The wine is gone. Jesus replies, *"Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come;"* which paraphrased might mean, *"Oh, mom, this isn't my problem."* But one can tell from the context He must have said this with a twinkle in His eye, perhaps with a wink and a nod to this woman who reared Him, because apparently His mother knew He was up to something. The words are no sooner out of Jesus' mouth when Mary turns to the servants and says, probably with a knowing smile of her own, *"Do whatever He tells you."* By the way, that line ought to be underlined twice in your Bibles: *"Do whatever He tells you."* In fact, that's probably the best piece of advice in the entire sixty-six books of the Bible ... DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU! And do it NOW. Mother Mary says to all of us who would serve Jesus. ***"Do whatever He tells you."***

What do you do when your "wine" is running out? Now that's a metaphorical question, of course. Every person in this room lives with a quiet fear the season will come for us when things will just run out, when the well will go dry, and we will have nothing left to give. Well, when your wine, whatever it may be, threatens to run out, look to Jesus, and *do whatever He tells you*. When the joy of life threatens to run short, look to Jesus, and *do whatever He tells you*. When your resolve for living with integrity and honor and sobriety threatens to fail you, look to Jesus, *do whatever He tells you*. When you are running out of patience, when you are running out of money, when you are running out of time, when you are running out of resolve, when you are running out of health ... whatever it is, *look to Jesus and do whatever He tells you*. Don't think about it, don't overanalyze it, don't wait for a "better" time to do what He tells you ... the time to do what He tells you is RIGHT NOW. Just do it. Choose to do what you know is right, what you know is honorable, what you know is good. *Do whatever He tells you*. If for no other reason than, more often than not, that's when the miracles happen.

What is it that Jesus decides to do? He decides to turn ordinary water into wine. Jesus is moved by the ordinary situation of a young, anonymous couple whose happy moment is almost over. It is there, according to John, that Jesus chooses to launch His world redeeming, time-shaking, life changing ministry right there in Nowhere Special with His first miracle ... a miracle that seems almost frivolous, if not downright reckless. According to the text, He gives what amounts to 180 gallons of wine to people who have already been drinking! That's a lot of wine! The master of the banquet said to the groom that most hosts bring out the cheap wine in the gallon jugs with the screwtop bottle caps after everyone has been drinking for awhile, but you have saved the best wine for last! What extravagance.

Notice, no one is healed. No injustice is made right. We are not sure that there are even any life lessons to be learned. So the reader might think, *"O Jesus, don't waste Your miracle-working power on this. Do something big!"* But more often than not, this is the way the Gospel works. The redemptive, life-saving, life transforming, miracle working power of grace comes in the present moment in the ordinary events and gatherings and conversations and celebrations of life with ordinary people in the everyday living of life ... and we discover God is right there in the thick of it just waiting to bless! In fact, the last line of the text tells us it was precisely *because* of Jesus' almost reckless extravagance here in Cana that the disciples came to put their faith in Him. THIS was a God they could give their allegiance to! They put their faith in this God-become-man Who deemed to enter the present moments of their lives to make their lives *better*.

And they also put their faith in Him because they saw what can happen when servants do what Jesus tells them to do. So they chose to become His servants, doing what He told them to do ... in the time they had, in the season of life they were in.

² Earlier we sang the old hymn, *" Dwelling in Beulah Land,"* which refers to our Old Testament reading from Isaiah, the only place this word "Beulah" is mentioned in the Bible. As briefly explained earlier in the service (and as footnoted in our Bibles) Beulah means "married;" it's a reference to the theological thread throughout the Bible that marriage is used as a metaphor of the relationship between God and His people ... and, as John might be intimating, this is part of the significance of Jesus launching His public miracle-making ministry at a wedding.