

“Mary Ponders These Things In Her Heart”

Luke 2:33-35

John 19: 25b-27

Lenten Lunch

Woodstock Ministerium

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

This past Advent I found myself imagining Mary as an older woman remembering and reflecting on the extraordinary events of her life. I used that creative imagination for some writing and for the poetry I read on Christmas Eve.

I have no doubts that the idea came to me because I too am “of a certain age” and even I find quiet times around the house to look back at my own life. As a mother, this exercise was particularly fitting as I reread the various biblical accounts leading up to the nativity as well as the birth itself.

That meditation could not stop with Christmas Day. Having engaged in this emotional practice my mind has continued to reflect on Mary and the challenges she faced as Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature”. Last week one of those FaceBook memes appeared: In the left corner is a statement “It sure wasn’t easy being the mother of Jesus”. And the picture has her reading a letter “Dear Mom, Gone into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. Don’t worry!, xo J.

From the whimsical to the real pain and suffering that would unfold in the following three years, Mary would ponder.

Lent is a time to re-center our lives – reconnect the broken pieces of our lives that have fallen away from our connection to God. It is a time to think about Jesus. But I fear sometimes that thinking becomes far too sentimental and other-worldly. When we think about walking with Jesus we often think about a stroll around the Garden. Or if we think “what would Jesus do?” it becomes an intellectual inquiry more than direct action. Jesus’ life and ministry, and yes even the passion narratives become a movie we observe. I have

found that the practice of deliberate imagination about Mary to be a helpful corrective to disengaged piety. Will you join me for a few minutes?

Now it can be fun to imagine the no doubt exasperating times Mary faced as a mother during those growing-up years. We know very little of that narrative. However, we do know that she did an exceptional job because Jesus was equipped mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually to live out God's call on his life after his baptism experience.

Yet within a very short time after Jesus assumed his public ministry Mary must have begun to both worry and wonder. The miracles that happened, the words that were said, the authentic faith that was being revealed would have all been sources of joy – a verification of those words she heard so long ago “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” That's the Jesus that made her heart swell – that's the Jesus we are drawn to and want follow along the fields of Galilee and the shore of the Lake.

Mary had heard other words all those years ago. Simeon had spoken to her directly when Jesus was eight days old. ”Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,)”.

In only three years Jesus gained many followers, but he also made many enemies. I can only imagine that Mary might have had some “I wish” thoughts as she pondered the events in her life.

“I wish I could have convinced him to take it easy with those controversial actions and statements. I wish he had not been so open in associating with some of those people with whom he shared a meal. I wish he had acted more as a disciple of one of the Temple priests and rabbis and slowly reinterpreted someone else's words into what he wanted to communicate. I wish I could have protected him from the anger.”

It's natural to have these thoughts – we have them – we even act on them. Jesus' teachings are difficult to hear and even more difficult to do. So sometimes we soft-pedal the difficult teachings in favor of broader more palatable teachings. We hear “love one another” but we see the parable of the Good Samaritan as a nice story of a different time and place. We hear Jesus saying the Law still counts so we concentrate on the Ten Commandments while we spend less time on the Sermon on the Mount hearing Jesus speak to us about anger and retributions and lust and lying. We read the stories of miraculous healing but we don't want to get too near those with unpleasant physical issues, whether disease or differently-abled.

When I reflect on Mary “pondering those three years” I know I also want to protect Jesus. I want to keep him here, walking just ahead of me but telling me what God is like. I want to learn from his way of being in the world. I want to stop him when that way of being causes conflicts. And of course in the desire to bask in wise words I fail to either hear them or observe what they mean. Here in Lent, I need to admit that I want to believe in him – and I want to follow him – part of the way, the part that doesn't draw attention to me or put me in danger.

To really contemplate Mary is to realize that following Jesus is going to draw attention to us. It is going to make some people angry with us. It is going to put us in a position where we might literally be in danger.

Jesus calls us to FOLLOW him. That means we are going to have to step into the messy places of life in order to be present and love authentically those who destitute, those who have no homes, those who are hungry with no hope of a meal, those who can't get a job, those who have fled from their homes and even their countries, those who have done things resulting in incarceration, those who can't take care of themselves any longer, those who are lonely.

It will also mean that we are going to be drawn into the cultural battles of our day as we stand with Jewish communities that are being threatened or Muslim neighbors whose houses of worship are being burned, or people of color who are being targeted with hate signs and actions, or immigrant families being torn apart parent from child.

Mary would have remembered the increasing tension of those three years of ministry. She would have remembered how she too was at risk because she was Jesus' mother. She would have remembered all the hateful and spiteful words and actions inflicted on Jesus' mind and body that day of passion. I have no doubts that she carried those memories with her every single day of her life.

She would have remembered His cross and all the other crosses lining the hillside. The cross of her memory would have been a "rugged one" not a neatly polished brass or gold ornament. But with that vision the cross, and pain, and sword driven not only into her son's side, but also into her heart – she would have remembered Jesus' love. She would have remembered his last words to her. She would have remembered that he died as he lived – authentically living Love not retribution in the world.

This Lent let us remember Jesus as he was, not as we would like to imagine him to be. Let us remember that Jesus always reached out to, touched, blessed, healed, and ate with those whom others would have discarded. Let us remember that Jesus calls us to FOLLOW him not just recite a belief about him. Jesus calls us to discipleship, a discipleship shaped by the cross but defined by active engaged love for one another. Amen.