

**The Making of a Family
John 2:1-12, Isaiah 62:1-5
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“At Cana and the cross, God draws us into a new relationship-an adopted family of faith.”

It's funny, but as big a place as she has in our minds and in our stories about Jesus, the Bible doesn't say too much about her. When we were in Jerusalem a couple of years ago we got to visit the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim holy site that is on the Temple mount and may be built over the place where Solomon's temple had been. When we went inside we noticed that there were many murals and paintings covering the walls, but as is Islamic tradition, there are no depictions of people or animals lest people be tempted to make them objects of worship. But our guide did show us a painting of a date palm on one of the pillars, with dates falling from it. And he asked us if any of us knew what that represented. None of us did, so he told us that it was Mary's palm tree. According to the Koran, when Mary went into labor with Jesus she was out in the desert alone and God caused a date palm to grow for her shade and dates to drop to give her food. Our guide told us that we may think it strange, but there is more written about Mary in the Koran than there is in the Bible.

This passage is evidence of that fact. In John's gospel, this is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, this is the first “sign.” In John's way of looking at things, Jesus doesn't do miracles, he gives us signs as to who he is and what he is about. And the transformation of water into wine is his first sign. And his mother was there. What may seem strange to us about John's gospel is that Mary only appears twice in John's gospel, here at the very beginning, and then at the very end, she is named as one of the people who watches him die on the cross. And she is never named in John's gospel. She is just called “the mother of Jesus.” And when Jesus speaks to her, he addresses her as “Woman.” I don't know about you, but I never addressed my mother that way. But Jesus does. Did you ever wonder why? Do you ever wonder if Mary didn't want him to do all the things he did, but just wanted him to come home?

What do you think about Mary? Now I'm as Protestant as they come. I don't have a problem with the virgin birth, but I've never been able to buy the perpetual virginity of Mary; I don't think that she was assumed bodily into heaven, I don't think that she intercedes with God on our behalf. But given that, she has always intrigued me. And being married to a woman from the Catholic tradition, my children went to bed for years saying both the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary. But we don't really know that much about her. We think she was a young woman, probably very young, maybe 14 or 15 which was a typical age for a woman to become engaged, when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. But John never mentions any of that. Luke and Matthew have stories about Jesus' birth, but in John we get a poetic introduction to the gospel relating the preexistence of the divine Christ: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It is John's gospel that speaks to us most strongly of the divinity of Christ, so his earthly family is not mentioned very much. Except here. He's invited to a wedding and he goes with his disciples, and his mother, and later we discover that his brothers were there too. What about Joseph? Did he just stay home? Has he passed away by this time? We don't know. We just know his mother was there.

Weddings in those days were multi-day affairs. Cana was about ten miles away from Nazareth where we assume Mary lived. Since it was a party that was supposed to last a while and people couldn't just hop in their cars and head home, it was a terrible thing to run out of wine. So Jesus helps them out by changing the water into wine. This is where the story gets very specific, telling us that this is the important part. There were six stone jars there each holding twenty to thirty gallons, and Jesus has the servants fill them up to the brim. The water is changed into wine, which means that they now have 120-180 gallons of wine—an amazing amount and excellent wine at that. John calls this a "sign" and it at least tells us that this person who has come to earth in the person of Jesus came to bless our lives with amazing abundance. This miracle shows the glory of Jesus, reflecting the glory of God and his disciples believe in him. Abundance of wine was one of the consistent Old Testament images for the

joy of the coming of the Messiah and the arrival of God's new age.¹ To John this person is not just the Messiah, but the one who participated with God in the very creation. As one ancient commentator has noted, what really happened here was “the water recognized its creator and blushed.”²

This sign is a blessing of a wedding, for it is a blessing to be married. In Isaiah the prophet proclaims that in their return from exile the people of Israel go from being called Desolate, to being called Married. In the old Bibles they still used the Hebrew word for Married which is Beulah. That's why in a bit we are going to sing the hymn Beulah Land. But the sign is given so that those who see may believe. The disciples believed.

Does his mother believe? We have to assume so, since she seems to be the mover behind this little miracle. But the story then goes on and we don't hear from his mother any more. That is until the very end. Mary is one of the people who are watching at the foot of the cross. She is there at the beginning, and at the end. Jesus shows in Cana in an extravagant way God's blessing through the wine, and he shows at the cross the extravagant lengths to which God will go to draw us unto himself, even giving up his beloved son. But it is from the cross that Jesus looks down and sees his mother and the apostle John standing with her. Because it is at the foot of the cross that still another divine gift is given: the creation of a new family of faith. In his dying moments, Jesus performs the last act of his public ministry as at Cana he had performed the first act. He speaks to his mother and to the disciple we assume was John and he entrusts them to each other. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” (19:26-27)

It is these words from the cross that give birth to the church, a new family of faith. Here, as in other places in the New Testament, the family model that Jesus endorses is that of adoption. Indeed, the words that Jesus speaks from the cross-- “Here is your son” and “Here is your mother”--resemble the formulas used for rites of adoption in the ancient world. As the scholar Craig Koester observes, “They

¹ Gench, Frances Taylor. *Encounters with Jesus*. p. 12.

² *Epigrammata Sacra. Aquae in Vinum Versae*, trans. Richard Crashaw. cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, p. 169.

are appropriate for a scene in which two people, who are connected by their common faith relationship with Jesus rather than by kinship ties, are brought together into relationship with one another, forming the nucleus of a new community.”³

A few years ago when we expanded the church, we intentionally created a library that was called the Resource Center and we wanted it to be used by everyone in the church. At the time we called it the “Family Resource Center.” That’s an interesting name. Does it mean that it contains resources to help support the families in our church? That would be a good thing—families are important and we want the church to be a place where they are strengthened. But I don’t think that’s what we really mean, or at least it’s not all that we mean. Do we think that typical nuclear families are all that the church cares about, that they are the only real families? One family ministry specialist Diana Garland says, a “Christian assumption about families that grows out of the New Testament is that we are to reach beyond the bonds of blood and marriage to embrace others as family.”⁴ When we look at Jesus relationship with his mother, both at Cana and at the cross we can see that “the church follows Christ by ensuring that no one in the family of faith is family-less—that everyone is adopted into the family. Indeed, in the community of faith, people should not be perceived simply in terms of a label like 'single.' Family is more than marital status. The work of the Christian church is to weave every believer into bonds of mutual commitment and love as real as any legal or biological bond recognized by society.”⁵ This is so important to the gospel of John, that he emphasizes at the very beginning in chapter one, that God is creating a new family of faith-- “But to all who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. That’s the good news in John. Yes, God blesses the wedding in Cana. He blesses us extravagantly through the love of one another, especially in the marriage relationship. But as Gail O’Day says, “People who have no families, who come from destructive families, or who are alienated

3 Koester, Craig. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*. p. 241

4 Garland, Diana. “*What is Family Ministry?*” *Christian Century*, November 13, 1996

5 Garland, D.

from their birth families can belong to a new family by virtue of becoming children of God.”⁶

According to tradition, from that day forward, the apostle John takes Mary into his home and treats her like his own mother. She lives with him until the end of her life. Maybe John becomes the son that Jesus couldn't be for her. By saying those words from the cross, Jesus creates a family where there was none before—just as he does here with us--”Behold, your brother, your sister, your father, your mother—your family.”

6 O'Day, Gail. “John” *The Women's Bible Commentary*. p. 304