



The Most Fascinating People: Mary

TEXT
Luke 2:41–52
John 19:25b–30

July 19, 2015 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

“**W**oman, here is your son.”
“My friend, here is your mother.”
I like to think that they took care of each other after Jesus told them that they belonged to one another like family.

We walk with Mary today. We think of her with an angel finding her in her teenage years and promising her that her son will change the world. It doesn't take an angel to convince a mother that her child will change the world. The truth is, most children *do* change the world — at least the world of her mother and father.

Those of you who have had a child know what I'm talking about. You see everything differently.

I was in seminary, and I was doing a summer internship in the mountains of western Virginia. Someone called the church and said that David and Debbie Smith were having their baby. Could I come to the hospital? I drove to the hospital and found David in the waiting room. He was pacing, and when I walked in, he grabbed my hand, so we paced together. He said, “I was back there with Debbie, but she

kicked me out because I was too nervous — can you believe that?”

The nurse came out and told David that he was a father; a little boy. I said, “What are you naming him?” David said, “Debbie says his name is William, but I'm calling him Scooter.” He said, “Come on.”

He started walking back into the delivery room, still holding my hand. I said, “David, I'm not sure you want me back there right now. I'm sure Debbie's tired.” He didn't let go. We walked in, and there was Scooter — not yet wrapped up in a blanket. I had never seen a newborn. I'd seen babies, but I'd never seen one when he first shows up. I've got to tell you, it's not our best moment.

I looked at that child; he had a pointed head, and he had not even had a bath yet. I wanted to say something encouraging, but the child looked real bad. Debbie said, “Isn't he beautiful?” I'm so grateful I realized it wasn't a question. “He's a looker,” I said. I've never seen anything like it. “He's just beautiful,” she said. “He does look just like his daddy.”

Now objectively, how beautiful that baby was could be argued. But his momma wasn't

objective. She saw through the eyes of love — which means, I think, that she saw that child as God sees every child.

You see where I'm going with this, right? When we love, we see things differently; the world changes. Mary was gifted with particular vision of how the world would change. She sings about it: “My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” If you listen to her song, she sings of how her child will change the world. *The poor will be lifted up. Justice will reign. All that has gone wrong will be set to rights.* It all sounds wonderful, but it's complicated.

It's complicated because the way God works in this world is through love. And love is both strong and weak. When we love, we are vulnerable.

In his book *Now and Then*, Frederick Buechner describes this love.

To love another, as you love a child, is to become vulnerable in a whole new way. It is no longer only through what happens to yourself that the world can hurt you but through what happens to the one you love also and greatly more hurtingly. When it comes to your own hurt, there are always things you can do. You can put up a brave front, for

one, and behind that front, if you are lucky ... you can become a little brave inside yourself. You can become strong in the broken places, as Hemingway said. ... But when it comes to the hurt of a child you love, you are all but helpless. ... The child's pain becomes your pain, and as the innocent bystander, maybe it is even a worse pain for you, and in the long run even the bravest front is not much use.¹

Mary understands this kind of love. The crowd gathered at the foot of Jesus' cross as if they were at the movies. His human suffering was entertainment. Some were really worked up about it, claiming his crucifixion was justice at work. But most were more casual; it's just the way things are.

But as he looked over the crowds, his eyes fell on Mary and a disciple that John describes as one whom Jesus loved. He found love in the crowd, and he said, "You belong to one another now." His last teaching was this: "You are family now."

If this were to be the last sermon I preached in my ministry, I don't know what I would say, but I am sure what I would think about. I would want my last word to be something important.

This was the last teaching Jesus shared: "Mother, this is my friend. Love him like you would love. And my friend, this is my mom. I want you to treat her like she belongs to you."

The gospel of Luke tells us of the only moment in Jesus' childhood that scriptures record. It is a story of Jesus getting lost from his parents, or his parents getting

lost from him. If that has happened to you, you never forget it.

We were at Disneyland. There was a climbing station with ropes and tunnels and nets that seemed to reach four stories high. Nathan was all over it. Parents stood at the bottom to watch. There he is, and then over there he is. It was great fun. You couldn't see the entire contraption, but you could see parts of it — most of it.

After some time, I realized it had been a while since I had seen Nathan. I methodically worked my eyes from one end of the play station to the other. I couldn't find him. I told myself, "He has to be up there." But I couldn't see him. It had been too long since I had seen him.

I called his name; no answer. I yelled his name; no answer. Like a grown-up diving into the ball pit at McDonalds, I started moving my adult self into the ropes and the tunnels and all over the place. No Nathan.

You obviously know it worked out OK, but for the longest six minutes of my life, it took everything I had to hold it together. It took everything I had just to breathe.

Mary was not six minutes away; she was a day's journey from Jerusalem. It took her three days to find Jesus. When she found him in the temple, she said, "Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." If you think "great anxiety" sounds polite for a mom who just found her lost son, you would be right. The Greek word is *odunaw*. It is an infrequently used word that speaks not just of anxiety,

but of torment. This is no casual anxiety; this is suffering.

This would not be the last time she would feel *odunaw*. Loving this child would make heartbreaking suffering unavoidable. She was there in the crowd watching her son being crucified. She had loved him from before he was born. She had known he would change the world from before he was born.

When Jesus sees her, he says, "Mother, my friend is now your son. Love him like you have loved me." It is as if Jesus knows that if we can see each other with the eyes of love, the world will change.

It was the winter of 1987, and I took a trip to the southern cone of Latin America. I was there to visit Presbyterian mission work in Chile and Argentina. At the time, I knew far too little of what military dictatorships were doing in so many Latin American countries at the time. So I was unprepared for the beautiful Friday morning in Buenos Aires when we went to the presidential palace, and there I saw the "March of the Mothers."

It sounds like a fundraiser of some kind, but it wasn't. These women, some older, some too young, marched in a circle around the plaza. They wore head scarves, and around their necks hung pictures of their children. Their children were young men and women who had been kidnapped by government forces in the middle of the night and killed — not by trial, but by terrorism of the state. They were never found. They were known as "the disappeared."

These mothers had been marching for ten years. Their children had been viewed as a bother, as someone who could be discarded, as unimportant. They just disappeared. But every Friday, mothers marched to declare to the world that those boys taken in the middle of the night belonged to someone.

“Woman, here is your son.”
It was Jesus’ last teaching.

I don’t know if they took care of one another, but I think so. I think that’s the way Jesus was changing the world. He was teaching us to see that we belong to one another.

Two weeks ago, police officer Mark Engravalle was called to the Walmart in Roeland Park.² They had a shoplifting suspect. He arrived to find Sarah Robinson, who had attempted to steal items for her children: diapers, baby wipes, some shoes. Officer Engravalle looked at those children, dirty, shoeless and hungry. Rather than arrest her, Officer Engravalle paid for the items out of his pocket. “I just wanted to do right by the children,” he said.

Now I know some will say she shouldn’t get away with this. I understand that. But I also know that when we see each other through the lens of love, it can change the world. It makes us just want to do right by one another.

The last teaching Jesus gave from the cross was this:
*You belong to one another.
Woman, here is your son. My friend, here is your mother.
Love one another like family. If you live like that is true, then*

everything I have come to accomplish will come to pass.

¹I would not have remembered this citation if Brueggemann had not included it in his book cited above. Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then* (Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 54–55. The reference to Hemingway is *A Farewell to Arms* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), p. 267.

²*Kansas City Star*, July 10, 2015, “Roeland Park Police Officer Pays for Shoplifter’s Diapers and Baby Wipes”

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The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.