



Series Theme: Lenten Journey – Following Jesus

Title: Hard to Be a Mother

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Synopsis: Becoming a Christian affects not only the person makes this leap of faith; such a declaration also affects those who know him/her. This is a powerful witness, one that can easily be overlooked. Following Jesus is not about the person alone; it is more about salvation and redemption which can be professed by all who believe. The story is not about us. It's about who God is, and how we are connected to the carrying forward of God's story, for the good of all.

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matthew 4:18-22 (NLT)

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matthew 20:20-28 (NLT)

MEMORY VERSE: "Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me.'" Mark 1:17a

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

Here we are, the second Sunday in Lent, now taking a second step along the path to the cross. Jesus took so many opportunities to teach people, people like Simon the Pharisee from last week's sermon, finding "teachable moments" to share the Good News.

But Jesus was not going to do this task alone. Jesus wanted, perhaps needed, others around him to be his helpers. He would prepare them, through teaching and example, so that they could also share his Good News. We know this was the case, since Jesus had twelve trusted disciples with him throughout his ministry. But calling these twelve affected others as well. This morning I want to share with you the story of one, a mother, who was affected by Jesus. She is not directly named in her story, but it can be inferred that her name was Salome. Here is her story:

Ah, me! Life seems to be one chore after another – cleaning, washing clothes, baking bread, preparing one meal after another – breakfast, dinner, supper. I thank God that I am still able to do this. I love taking care of my family. I know it is a lot of work, but that is what a good mother does. My life is filled with hard work, but my husband takes good care of us. He is a fisherman and he has done so well that he has some other men helping him. I thank God that my husband Zebedee is still able to tend to his fishing nets. It is good that our sons, James and John, are growing up and are able to help him. I think they are almost ready to take over the business. Then Zebedee could get some rest for his gnarled fingers, fingers that can mend nets in his sleep.

Oh, I must get things ready, on the table. They will soon be coming in for our midday meal. I hope I have prepared enough food. These boys are always hungry, always busy with something, always loud and noisy, we even have a nickname for them – sons of thunder. They always can be heard, they can't come into a room without creating a ruckus. They don't know how to be quiet. I love them so much. It warms my heart to see them growing up, learning their father's trade, helping some of the other fishermen. They are good boys. We have raised them well. When it is time for them to marry, my hope is that they will stay right here, close to us, ready to help when we get too old to do for ourselves. My boys are such a joy!

Here they are now – quieter than usual – they must be too hungry to be noisy. I see only my Zebedee now.... They boys must be finishing up their work. I smile at Zebedee but there is no smile on his face. My smile changes into confusion.

Where are my boys? Zebedee can't look me in the eye. He looks older somehow than he did just this morning. Older, and so tired. What happened? I try to look over his shoulder to see if they are coming. Only Zebedee, it's only him, no boys with him? What happened? Did they fall off the boat and drown? I know something bad has happened to them. A mother knows these things. Zebedee, tell me, what happened to our boys? Did they fall off the boat or did something worse happen to them?

What? A man came by on the shore and invited them to come and follow him? And they did? Just like that? They just got up from their mending, dropped their nets, and went with him? Did they say goodbye to you? They didn't come to say goodbye to me. And what about clothes and food? They didn't come back here to the house to get anything. Are you saying they just got up and followed this man? You're joking, right? You're just telling me this story because you don't want me to know the truth. They fell off the boat, they drowned. They're dead. Oh, I don't know how I can handle such news. It is so hard to be a mother, a mother's heart breaks whenever anything bad happens to her children and now you're afraid to tell me what really happened.

What? You are telling me the truth? And you maybe recognized this man? You think it was that itinerant preacher Jesus? The one from Nazareth? The one who has been wandering all over the countryside preaching about God? Isn't it enough that we go to the Temple and give sacrifices? What has he put in our sons' heads that they would just walk away from their family, their home, their work, their mother? Oh, this is just awful! I couldn't bear to be in our house, table laid out with food for all of us, it's just too much to bear. I have to get outside, run away from what Zebedee just told me. I am so angry. But I can't be angry at my husband. He is just as devastated as I am. Our sons are gone. Out in the fresh air, I try to breathe, slowly, trying to calm my worst fears. The breeze brushes past me, warming, calming, comforting. But I am beyond comfort. I have left my beloved husband, sitting inside, his face leathered from sun and wind, staring down at his dirty, calloused hands, suddenly weary. I am distraught.

Now we will move forward in Salome's story a year or two. Her sons have stayed with Jesus. They have come through town several times and so Salome has seen her boys then. She has seen how much Jesus depends on her boys. They seem to be a part of

Jesus' inner circle. They were two of the first disciples Jesus called. And she has heard more about Jesus. Heard how he is telling people how much God loves them, heard how Jesus wants everyone to love God in return and to love others just as much. She was surprised that Jesus did not mention anything about sacrifices at the Temple or following some of the strict rules of her Jewish faith. Rather she heard that Jesus said the best way to see heaven, to love God, is to become like little children. She was intrigued by these new ideas. She wanted to know more.

One of the things that most interested her was her sons' interest in Jesus as King. They had heard this title used on more than one occasion – King of the Jews. This really caught the attention of both James and John. They were totally dedicated to Jesus and wanted to do all they could to help him. They wondered whether they could be devoted advisors to Jesus when he became king. Maybe serving him, one on each side of his throne. This interested Salome as well. Let's hear what she is thinking.

James and John were just here. They were so excited – sons of thunder indeed – they are so dedicated to helping Jesus. They told me they have heard rumors – not from Jesus himself – but from those following him – that Jesus has been called a king. Well, not yet, but sometime in the future, Jesus will gather his followers together, overthrow the Romans, and declare himself king of the Jews! What a time of great joy that would be! To no longer serve Rome but instead serve our Jewish king! And my boys would be just the ones to counsel Jesus then. They would be such a help – one on either side of Jesus – listening, advising, counseling. How glorious that will be for Israel!

And it wouldn't be bad for me either. Being close to the king would bring our family good things – possibly a place to live in a palace, some money so we would no longer need to earn our living fishing. I might have servant so that I wouldn't have to work so hard. Live could be much easier for me. This though is appealing. I know what I'll do – the next time Jesus passes through our town, I'm going to make just that suggestion.

Oh, my, that didn't go well. I just saw Jesus and asked a favor from him – to let my boys sit in places of honor, next to Jesus, one at his right side and the other at his left. But Jesus didn't answer my question! Instead he asked me whether I knew what I was asking? He made it sound like serving beside him would be

dangerous and harmful rather than making life easier and more secure. And the other disciples – they got angry with James and John. They had to know that my boys were some of Jesus’ favorites. It wouldn’t have been unusual for Jesus to choose favorites to help him when his time came. Instead of seeing himself as king – being served, Jesus saw himself as a servant to others. Now I am confused. No kingly favors, no power, no prestige, only serving others. We do that already. I’m going to need time to think about this Jesus and his confusing messages.

Scripture mentions Salome only one more time. Jesus has come to Jerusalem, he has been arrested, tried, and convicted to death. He has been taken out of the city to be crucified. In Matthew 27:55-56 we read: And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph) and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

This woman, the mother of James and John, has now become a believer. So much so that she has left her home in order to follow Jesus just as her sons have done. We don’t know what other things Salome experienced, but we do know that she raised one son – John, who became the beloved disciple, writer of a gospel account as well as three letters to the new church and penned the words of Revelation. James became an evangelist and was the first disciple to be executed. It is hard to be a mother, to experience the many ups and downs of motherhood. It is also hard to let children go, to do the things they are called to do, to learn from them, to support and love them no matter what they do, even if that means giving them up to martyrdom.

We can be like Salome as well. We can hear about Jesus with skepticism, become curious, desire more information, begin praying and learning, reading scripture, and finally give our lives over to Jesus, completely – without counting the cost. It’s not easy being a mother – and it’s not easy being a follow of Jesus, a Christian. Hold that thought. Let us pray.