

2 Epiphany, Year C – *The Jewish Mother*

Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11; Psalm 36:5-10

The Rev. Skip Bushee

We all know that Jewish mothers are notorious for the persistent way they have of badgering their children to achieve ever more in life. Here are some statements attributed to Jewish mothers of famous people in history:

Mona Lisa's Jewish mother said, "This you call a smile, after all your father and I spent on braces?"

Christopher Columbus' Jewish mother said, "I don't care what you have discovered. You still should have written."

Michelangelo's Jewish mother said: "Why can't you paint on walls like other children. Do you know how hard it is to get this stuff off the ceiling?"

And, finally, Moses Jewish mother who said: "That's a good story. Now tell me where you've really been for the last forty years."

We sometimes forget that Jesus had a Jewish mother as well, and I suspect that she played no small part in his upbringing and his achieving of greatness. In this morning's Gospel lesson, we find Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry, just three days after the calling of his first disciples and barely five days after his baptism by John. He was probably focused on organizing and teaching his followers and wanted to do so without distraction but instead, they were called to attend a wedding in Cana, a village not far from Nazareth. I suspect that they attended only after much prodding by his mother, Mary. "Here is my son, 30 years old and not even a girl friend yet. You would think he would at least go with his mother to his cousin Sadie's wedding."

And then they get there to find that they have run out of wine. Mary asks her son to perform a miracle and I am sure that all Jewish mothers believe their sons capable of producing miracles. But Jesus refuses, saying that his hour has not yet come. I can see it all now. Mary says, "Oy, the shame. Here were are with this family that will never again be able to show their faces in public. And my son, the Messiah, refuses to lift a finger to help." Well, as we know, not even the Son of God could resist this kind of pressure and so Jesus performed his first miracle.

I doubt that all Jewish mothers believe their sons to be the Messiah but I suspect that most of them believe that their children are capable of performing miracles, given enough prodding.

Miracles. The word itself is a challenging one because for many it implies that some sort of magic trick is involved. Much has been written about how many of the miracles performed by Jesus in the Bible could be explained by scientific phenomena. Having been trained as a scientist, I tend to fall into this trap myself. For this reason, we usually

see the word translated not as miracles but as signs. This makes a lot of sense because these events are not so much unexplained phenomena but signs of God's loving presence in our world. The word signs also implies that these events are not performed by individuals, like magic tricks, but are performed by God.

So were these signs limited to biblical times or are they happening in our world today? I asked this question in the Sunday morning Bible study last week and the consensus was that yes, signs happen all the time. I know that I can look back on my life and cite a number of instances where something happened that could not be explained by natural means. I suspect that each of you can relate stories of times where God's hand touched your lives as well.

But the more important question is can we through prayer actually influence God to act in the world on our behalf? Once again, I believe the answer is a resounding yes. Jesus told his disciples as he tells us that if we have faith, we will be able to accomplish great signs and wonders. Prayer really works. There is even scientific proof that people in hospital fare better on average if prayers are offered on their behalf than those who are not so blessed.

But Jesus calls us to do much more than sit around all day and pray. For God's signs and wonders to happen, we must go out into the world and help make things happen. We need to visit the sick and infirm. We need to offer shelter to the homeless. And we need to confront injustice in the world. Jesus and his disciples did not sit around praying all day. They went out two by two, carrying only their faith, but they went out. They confronted human misery directly. They healed by directly laying on human hands, not by wishing from afar.

And so must we. We must go to Hopkins Manor each month and take the grace of this community to the people there. We must help bring a meal to the people of the Maple Street Homeless Shelter from time to time and serve those people with our own hands. These things represent only a small commitment of our time but God multiplies our efforts in the grace and goodwill and healing that goes on. We may never know ourselves how a kind word we have spoken or a comforting hand we have placed on a shoulder may ultimately lead to returning an ill, addicted or troubled person to health and a productive life. We may never know of the signs and wonders God is working through us but they are happening nonetheless.

Jesus was fortunate to have a Jewish mother to goad him into action. She knew her son was capable of performing signs and wonders. Without her to tell him to go to the wedding and turn that water into wine, who knows? He might never have accomplished so much. Guess what. Each one of us is just as capable of performing great signs and wonders if only we would get out and try. The trouble is that most of us don't have Jewish mothers to urge us along and I can stand up here and preach until I am blue in the face but I still wouldn't qualify.

But there is hope. Mary is our Jewish mother as well and she is saying to each of us, “I know you can do it. Now stop with excuses already and get your tush out there.”