

"LETTING HIM GO"
5th Sunday in Lent
March 18, 2018
Mark 3:31-35

Just then Jesus' mother and brothers showed up. Standing outside, they relayed a message that they wanted a word with him. He was surrounded by the crowd when he was given the message, "Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside looking for you."

Jesus responded, "Who do you think are my mother and brothers?" Looking around, taking in everyone seated around him, he said, "Right here, right in front of you—my mother and my brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

You might say that Lent is the Season of Being Ruggedly True. Gospel presumptions about the infallibility and indestructibility of Jesus are stripped away. The disciples are brought along into the Jesus-life, being introduced to the God of compassion, justice, and purpose. They have willingly given themselves over to The Way, and just as they are getting the hang of it, Jesus is forcibly ripped away from them. In stark contrast to his teachings on compassion, justice, and forgiveness, the disciples are witness to the Empire's lack of any of them when it comes to Jesus. Just as they are getting the hang of this Jesus-life, it is torn away from them and they must engage the spiritual practice of letting him go.

The disciples have become his friends, but his family—now that's another thing altogether. Mother Mary has watched her special child recognize and claim his spiritual gifts. She has kissed him as he has left her home to follow his calling. She has had to learn to hold on tight, loosely. It's not quite the same as the first day you took your child or grandchild to the school bus and cried quietly as you walked alone back to your car or home, but try to tell your heart that it is different!

Letting go. Letting go of him. Today it seems as though every political action group, Christian religious brand, and many privateers claim to know the heart of Jesus. Some carry him on their posters and banners, claiming to own Jesus as their very own mascot. This is true whether you are ultra-conservative or ultra-liberal. This is as true if you are reading a post from Jerry Falwell or from John Dorhauer. It all seems like idolatry to me.

Jesus asked questions far more than he ever provided answers. His main teaching tool was the question. "Examine your heart for the answers," he counseled. To be precise, Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 183 of which he only answers 3. For every question he answers directly he asks—literally—a hundred. Think about that a minute—one hundred questions for every ONE answer. UCC Theologian Martin Copenhaver writes of this peculiarity,

Through Jesus' questions, he modeled the struggle, the wondering, the thinking it through that helps us draw closer to God and better understand, not just the answer, but ourselves, our process and ultimately why questions are among Jesus' most profound gifts for a life of faith.

Every time people in the Gospels try to hold tight to Christ, he tells them they must let him go. This spiritual discipline is easier for some to embrace than others. His mother has a particularly hard time letting Jesus go...

There he goes, off again with his disciples. They stopped at home for a quick meal, gave me a quick kiss and hug, and off they went. He left me alone today as he has on so many other days, but somehow, this day feels different. My skin is crawling right now. My prayers are bouncing off the walls of my eating space and nothing is returned. God is strangely and maddeningly quiet these days, watching with me the drama that is unfolding in my son's life. My skin is crawling and my mouth is dry of spit. I fear. I worry. I want to run after him and pull him back into my rocking chair where he used to coo as I suckled him, my baby, my Jesus. I want to protect him from himself.

But this I cannot do. I have to let him go. I have to let him go do what he must. His life is bigger than my need. The world has claimed him as its own son now, and I must step aside. Selah.

We want what we want, don't we? I think I am not so different than you! Like you, I want Jesus to live in the box I have created in my mind for him. I need him to reassure me that I am doing the right things, that I am praying the right way, that I am living the God-life as he teaches. I want him to tell me that I am his own true one, his disciple even as he is my own son, my own flesh and blood. Is that so wrong? Selah.

A wise woman told me a parable the other day. She told me this: "There was a flower standing alone in the desert. By night, the flower closed up tightly so as to keep out the cold and the predators. But when the morning sun came over the hills in the distance, the flower opened to let in the light, the warm, and the helpful insects."

This is what I think she was trying to say to me: The risk of one staying tight in a bud is greater than the risk one takes to bloom. I want Jesus to stay tightly protected against the coming night, but I know in my heart that I must let the light of God in so that he can bloom and fulfill the world's need. Selah.

Oh, my soul aches. My spirit has traveled into the depths of Sheol. I traveled the other day 25 miles from Nazareth to Capernaum with his brothers and sisters to see Jesus. We, his family, are concerned about his mental health, to use jargon you might understand. He is pouring it on against the Pharisees, and they are cursing him, threatening him. Jesus can't-won't stop his in-your-face preaching and healing, even against the Sabbath laws. It is though he is possessed by a spirit himself. I am his mother and I felt as though I had to get him out of there, for his own good. You just can't keep testing the fates like that! We only have his welfare in our hearts. It is clear to all who know him that he is out of his mind. Selah.

I traveled all that way just to show my son that I love him, that I know what's best for him. His brothers only care for his safety. My friends and relations are all talking about him, whispering in low tones when I draw near. I am the laughingstock of Nazareth, because my son Jesus has lost his marbles. I went all that way to rescue him, to take him back into my custody, but he wouldn't see us. He wouldn't even see his family! That just isn't done in Jewish life. Respect and care for one's parent, especially a widowed mother, is enormously important in our orthodox practice. Shame on him! Selah.

This is what he told us: He said, "You have to let me go, Mother. You have to let me go, my brothers and my sisters. My

Father in heaven calls to me, and these people who follow me are my family now."

Shocking. Disrespectful to me, his mother. It reminded me of that time when he, a mere boy of 12, ran off one day while we were visiting Jerusalem. I was frantic! I searched high and low for him, crying and yelling and fearing the worst for him. We finally found him days later in the temple, reading the scriptures. Here we thought he had been kidnapped by slave traders or taken by wild dogs!

I remember questioning him, "Why would you do this thing? Why have you treated us like this?" But he just looked questioningly at us and answered me, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I would be in my Father's house?" I never forgot how he told me from this early age that he belonged to someone else. He was my child, but he was the Son of God. It was the first day of this long journey I am on of letting him go. Selah.

The other day when he would not see me, I was hurt, dejected. I birthed him, I fed and clothed him, I grieved his father's death with him, too. He was supposed to take care of me after that. We are family. But we are not his only family now. His new family are those who "follow God's will," as he puts it. Well, how can I follow God's will when I see that Jesus is heading into his own destruction? How can

God ask me to step aside and watch my own flesh and blood be arrested and crucified on Golgotha? How can God ask this of anyone?

My skin is crawling. My hands are raw for the wringing of them. I know what is coming, and I am powerless to stop it. Oh, how I love you, my Jesus! God, DO SOMETHING! How can you sit idly by and let them take my son, YOUR son? How can you let Herod declare him to be an enemy of the Jews? How can you let Pilate have his sadistic fun with him? How can you let the disciples lose their teacher, his brothers and sisters lose their sibling? How, God, can you let his mother so soon weep again for her lost love ones?

Where are you, my God? Why aren't you saying anything? Jesus tells me I have to let him go. That's well and good, but now what am I supposed to hang onto? Oh, the disciple life is hard. Selah. The disciple life is hard for a mother who deeply loves her son! When Empire takes him away from me for good, when will I ever see him again?

These are the wanderings and questionings of a mother's broken heart.

But Perhaps It Is So.... I've got to let him go.