

Ask and Then Do as He Tells You

Here we are again, listening to that marvelous storyteller, Mr. Metaphor. One can spend a lot of time with the story of the wedding at Cana; finding all the various nuances and meanings.

Today I'm going to offer what I came up with in my lectio Divina.

*Jesus replied to his mother,
"Woman, what concern is that to you and me?"*

Text message from my daughter: "*Mom, Julie is pregnant!*".

Me: "*Oh, nice. Who is Julie?*"

Daughter: "*you know, my co-worker.*"

Me: "*Ah. Ok.*"

Then there's the role of my eyes upward as I think, "and I needed to know that why?"

Ok. That wasn't a real conversation but I think you get the idea.

When we are told something by someone close to us it is often a question rather than a statement. In response, though, I wonder how many of us have said (or thought) something similar to Jesus's words like: "so what?", "what am I supposed to do about it?", "why are you telling me?", "why should I care?", "big deal." "and...?", or "o – kay?". I'm guessing just about everyone here.

Sometimes we say it with an inquisitive "say more" tone. But just as often I think we say it with disinterest if not irritation. It's not that we really aren't interested or not sympathetic. I think it is an unconscious learned response.

I feel unnerved every time I read these words of Jesus—which, by the way, he says to others; such as to Peter when he asks Jesus about "the disciple whom Jesus loved" in John 21:22: "*If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?*"

I feel unnerved because I just can't wrap my mind around the idea of the Messiah being so rude! Why would a loving son, friend, and teacher say something that gives the impression that he or we shouldn't care about what is happening within our close circle of family and friends let alone the world outside our circle? Was Jesus really rude?

Scholars and Bible translators say that the terminology for those times was not considered rude—in fact even respectful. Knowing that, it still unnerves me.

When I asked him a question about something Jesus said, New Testament Scholar John Dominic Crossan told me: "the question is **not** why did Jesus say it; the question **is** why did the writer say it"? In other words, what were the writers of the Gospels trying to convey to their readers through their accounts of Jesus's life?

With that in mind, I ask: "Why did John quote Jesus saying to his mother, "*Woman, what concern is that to you and me?*"

First, let's consider briefly the where and when John wrote his Gospel. Most scholars agree on two things; 1) the Gospel was probably written by the Apostle John and 2) that it was written

somewhere between 90 and 110 CE. It is also generally accepted to have been written in Ephesus.

According to the letter of Paul to the Ephesians the church in Ephesus was doing well—was faithful.

But consider this. At that time Ephesus was a very wealthy port city. The resident people lived very well. It was home to The Temple of Artemis (or Diana) which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

The time frame given for the writing of John's Gospel spans 20 years during which there were 3 Roman Emperors: Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan. None of these emperors were particularly interested in persecuting Christians so the Church in Ephesus was able to thrive and even grow.

I don't know this so I may be going out on a limb here. I think it safe to say that with little persecution and the strong leadership and teachings of the Apostles John and Paul, it is likely that they had a pretty good life.

Do we know what that might have been like for the Church in Ephesus at that time? To have a good job, a good family life, a good church community, and good church leadership? I think we do.

You may remember in my last sermon I talked about the “royal consciousness”—complacency—keeping the status quo; being so comfortable you don't want things to change.

In The Revelation to John Chapter 2, John quotes “the one he encountered” in his vision writing to the Ephesians: *“I know your works, your toil... and I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, then, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first.”*

This 1st century church in Ephesus was faithful and loving—except they had gotten complacent. They did what they were supposed to do, but the reason for doing it had gotten lost.

This is the environment in which the Gospel of John was written: a Christian church made up of Jewish converts and Gentile God Fearers living a pretty good life in a diverse, affluent city surrounded by people who practiced the Roman religion, and, of course, Jews. As long as order was kept in the city, all was well.

In this atmosphere, the Church fell into the easy kind of Christianity: going to worship, sharing meals, having get togethers, getting married, and having children.

It seems to me that the writer of the Gospel of John saw what was happening and the potential for this complacency to spread. John wanted to, “metaphorically speaking”, “nip that in the bud for all time.”

With just one question, as John quotes Jesus, he tells his readers complacency and sitting around while help is needed doesn't cut it for Christians. As an example: “Eh! So what if Mr. Jones' wife is sick. They aren't part of our Church. What does that have to do with us? Doesn't he have family to help him take care of the kids? It's his fault he isn't better prepared to handle things.”

You see, Jesus wasn't asking why his mother was telling him. Jesus was asking her, "what do **we** need to do?"

To be sure it was not a cataclysmic catastrophe that the party was out of wine, but what came after shows what happens when we do something after asking Jesus for help.

Remember the story. All Jesus did was tell the stewards to fill the jars with water. It doesn't say he waved his hands over the jars or touched the water first. The act of obedience and action changed everything. By the time a taste of the water got to the person in charge it had changed to wine.

Asking and then doing.

So here we are today. We are in a beautiful—dare I say near paradisaic area. We are very nearly untouched by the calamity that exists in other parts of the world and in places near to us that might as well be far away.

How easy it would be to become complacent like the Ephesians. How easy it would be to just stay here like this.

My heart can hardly stand the awfulness that has once again occurred with the fires in Pacific Palisades, Alta Deena and other parts of Los Angeles. They are too soon reminiscent of the Tubbs Fire, the Complex Fire, the Camp Fire, and the Lahaina Fire. Let us not forget the recent weather-driven destruction in North Carolina and other parts of the Southeast.

I am going to suggest that we already know what we can do. We, here, must not become complacent; we must not shut our eyes and continue as if we do not know or can do nothing. Each of us here can participate in being the light of Jesus in the darkness of these disasters. We know the way.

But for practicality sake I will remind us.

- * At 11:30 today we will have a disaster preparedness forum to learn how to be personally and as a church prepared to handle any disaster—well hopefully any.
- * In the Weekly-E and in today's bulletin there is a list of recommended ways to help the victims of the LA fires.
- * Locally the Five Cities Homeless Coalition is always looking for volunteers to support the warming center during this winter.
- * Volunteers to make and serve meals at People's kitchen is very much needed.
- * Even within our walls here, there are ways to use our individual special gifts that Apostle Paul reminds us of.
- * Our Prayers of the People name people to whom we can offer hope and support.
- * And always, always, always, be mindful of our non-human creation friends. Be kind and considerate in the use of natural creation.

So the question is: "Jesus, there so many hurts and disasters some of them climate driven, some of them human driven?"

And Jesus answers us: "Fill the jars with water and take them to the one in charge."

Ask and then do as he tells you.