

Jesus is going away. That's the chief message in this section of John, which encompasses more than the brief verses we heard this morning. As a matter of fact, the Farewell Discourse, as it is usually called, covers four chapters of John's Gospel, or nearly a fifth of the entire book. Jesus is going away, and he is giving the disciples directions for the time after his departure. Judging from the length of his instruction, we might guess that Jesus does not have great confidence in the disciples' ability to handle things well in his absence. Can you blame him? Throughout his earthly ministry, the disciples have not given him cause for such confidence. They argue amongst themselves, jostle for position, curry favor and continually miss the point of Jesus' life and ministry. What would make him think they would do any better after he is gone?

Today's passage is a microcosm of the larger discourse. It continues the message we heard last week, with Jesus insisting that the best way to love him is to keep his commandment. What is this commandment? That the disciples love one another. After repeating this injunction, he promises them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will come along to help guide them after Jesus has gone. He

reassures them with a promise of peace and comfort. And throughout the discourse, Jesus makes constant reference to the authority of the Father.

Wait a minute. Why does this seem so deeply familiar? Let's go over that again. Someone important is going away. That someone is reciting a set of lengthy instructions to a group of dependents who have a less-than-exemplary track record. There are reassurances, and warnings, and promises, and even a back up care-giver who will arrive on the scene at some unspecified future time. And throughout all of this, the name of the Father is evoked for special authority. Why does this seem familiar? I pondered all of this as I was driving back from DC yesterday, where I had been visiting my oldest son Matthew. In the hypnotic state that driving can induce, the words of the gospel were mingling in my brain with what I had said – or not said - to Matthew. In the background was the music of a CD he had burned for me. For just a moment, I tuned into the lyrics. Van Morrison was singing. "Oh Mama told me there'd be days like this." Suddenly, it all came together. I had a ground-breaking revelation. **Jesus is Mom.**

After you've laughed a bit, and then put aside the notion of reporting me for blasphemy, I want you to consider this suggestion seriously. Of course it is Mother's Day today, and this could simply be a convenient if creative way for me

to tie this most religious of holidays to this morning's gospel. That is partially true. But I submit to you that what is more than partially true is that Jesus is, indeed, playing the mother role here with his disciples. And if I can convince you of that, I hope I can also convince you that he plays the mother role with us as well.

Anyone here who is a mother, or has a mother, will get the connection. I remember preparing to go away on a three-day conference when my own boys were 13, 11 and 9 years old. I was leaving in the morning, and Doug would not be home until late that evening. I had worn myself out setting up childcare, dogcare, transportation and food arrangements, but a few holes remained. One hole was that very afternoon: they would be on their own after school until the babysitter arrived at supper time. They were wonderful boys and I loved them. But I had every reason to fear. They broke things. They spilled things. They forgot things that were important, such as taking the dog out for an afternoon pee, and remembered things I wished they'd forgotten, such as where I had stashed the left over Halloween candy. They asked for help when they should be self-sufficient and refused to do so when help was genuinely needed. Most worrisome to me, their mother, was the knowledge that the three of them did not always get along. And so the instructions I left with them were lengthy but clear, and boiled down to a few important themes. Promise me you will take care of one another.

Don't tease Peter. Share, and listen, and be helpers. If you do as I ask, everything will be fine. The babysitter will be along in a little while. I love you. Your Father and I are in agreement on all these things, and he has an important meeting at church tonight, so you had better not do anything that means he has to come home early.

Jesus is Mom. He loved his disciples, and he loves them still. He knew all too well that they would fall short, and yet he knew that everything depended upon them getting along. Love one another, he kept saying to them. Even while remembering how they argued on the road about who was the greatest. How Peter fell out of the boat and later wouldn't let him wash his feet. How they tried to build booths after the revelation on the mountain. How they worried about having enough food for the crowds. How they couldn't cast out demons and forgot to pray and chastised the woman with the fragrant ointment. How none of them could quite get what Jesus was really about. If only they would love one another, everything would be alright. The work of the Kingdom could go on without him here on earth. Jesus loved them, and feared for them. Somehow, he also trusted them to grow up and do the work he had given them to do. Somehow, they learned enough about love that they managed to do it. And because they did, we are here today, hearing the same lesson. Love one another.

Jesus is Mom. I don't mean to suggest an entire new Christology based on the exploration of gender as a social construct (although I imagine there is some former Swattie at Harvard Divinity School working on just such a thesis as I speak). But mother, as archetype, is surely a part of God, as surely as the Father is a part of God. And God knows we need that feminine archetype more than ever, as we children continue to fight and kill, breaking the fragile web of life and spilling our lethal chemistry experiments into the waters. Jesus looked on his disciples as a mother looks on her children. Doing so, he loved them, and he feared for them. Leaving them, he ached for them as only a mother can, whose children are a part of her very body, wishing to save them from themselves.

It is of course the same for us in the church today. "Love one another" is still the instruction he gives us, with love and trepidation and a desperate prayer. WE are his body, after all, and he loves us with a desperate and unconditional love that knows our every gift and flaw. I don't imagine Jesus cares too much what we really believe about the Bible or his own mother's virginity. He isn't sitting up there on the right hand of God worrying about whether we stand or kneel when we pray. He really doesn't fret about the sexual orientation of the clergy. Being a mother, I think he loves his children just as we are. All these things that we in churches argue and boast and pontificate about are not on his list of

instructions. But there is one thing that continues to concern him, as much as it did when he left his parting instructions to those first disciples so many centuries ago at supper in a dusty room. It is, simply, that we love one another. He wants us to be good to one another, and help one another, and look out for the little ones. Are we doing that, fellow Christians? Don't you think we can do better? We are siblings, after all, sisters and brothers of one mother and one father. Love one another, Jesus says. That's all he asks of us. Your Father and I are united on this one. And that's just what Mama said.