

Re-considering Johannine Discipleship with the Feminine Image of Jesus:

Taking God's Maternal Duty

(Focused on the Gospel of John 6 and 21)

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I. Introduction

In Christian faith, the discipleship must be identified with Jesus' ministry that shattered any exclusionary barriers and boundaries. However, there seems to be an invisible boundary of the Christian ministry, especially its liturgical practices, as far as gender issues are concerned. Some traditional churches still deny women's ability to preside over Holy Communion, distributing its consecrated elements, *bread* and *wine*; other churches even deny women's ordination. The denials of women's ability are revealed not only from the conservative mind of the male-dominated church authorities but also from the lay participants of Holy Communion, who are bombarded by the traditional beliefs, prejudices, and the false imagination of the liturgy. In a sense, the Sacraments are invisibly functioning to reinforce male clerical power and to maintain an exclusionary boundary, even though the meaning of liturgical practices is pretty much developed to embrace all people in contemporary Christian faith. It shows an ambivalence between the Christian faith and its liturgical practice.

In my opinion, all these denials and prejudices relate with the male-centered discipleship, which is fundamentally derived from the paternal image of God and Jesus' character of maleness. So people can easily imagine that it is more authoritative for the liturgical works such as Holy Communion to be conducted by male clergy. Thus, one needs to re-consider the image of God and Jesus' ministry in light of feminist perspective in order for transcending androcentric imagination and its traditional prejudice; so that we not only re-define the meaning of Christian discipleship but also overcome the ambivalence of the liturgical practice.

The image of Jesus is associated with the experiences and memory of the people who encountered the image of Deity. This is because a specific memory and experience builds up people's religious metaphor and its imagination. Those memories eventually form a specific perspective for seeing the character of Jesus and its metaphorical image beyond the text and even beyond the nature of Jesus. Interestingly, based on the metaphor of God who feeds and nurses, the Gospel of John represents Jesus' maternal image, particularly Jesus as the mother who provides food, feeding and nursing for eternal life. Especially, when Jesus provides the breads and fishes to feed the crowds (6:1-15) and the disciples after the resurrection (21:1-14), the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the mother who *takes the maternal duties* to feed and nurse the children of God, as God had taken the maternal responsibilities in the wilderness and so did the female Wisdom. Furthermore, the Gospel of John presents Jesus' unfailing maternal love and his maternal duties as true discipleship by entrusting Jesus' maternal responsibilities to the

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disciples for the continuation of Jesus' love as a mother.

In this article, I am going to focus on two feeding narratives: the feeding of the multitude (John 6:1-15) and the feeding of the disciples by the shore after the resurrection (21:1-14), specifically concentrating on the metaphor of Jesus who feeds and nurses and its symbolic function. Firstly, I will investigate the metaphor of God who provides food in the Old Testament and the female Wisdom that is described as a hostess who provides the foods for life with God. Here one can find a maternal image of Deity and her maternal duties. Then, I will analyze the narrative of feeding the multitude (6:1-15) and Jesus' bread discourse (6:25-51) in light of the metaphor of the one who feeds and nurses. Then, I am going to study the last feeding narrative in which Jesus not only prepares breakfast for the disciple by the shore, but also entrusts the maternal duties to the disciples.

II. Maternal Image of God in the Old Testament

1. God who feeds and nurses

In the Old Testament, the metaphor of God who feeds is strongly associated with the maternal image of God.²⁾ God's provision of food to Israel in the wilderness expresses Israel's understanding of the special relationship with God, which clearly formed Israel's religious imagination. Here the relationship between God and Israel is based on the metaphor of God as mother who feeds and Israel as a baby who completely relies on the mother. A baby drinks and takes his/her nutritional needs from the mother's breast. Likewise, Israel had enough manna to eat in the wilderness every day from God's favor (Num. 11:1-15; Exod. 16:1-36). Based on this understanding, Claassens affirms that the metaphor of a mother nursing her baby provided a fitting description of God's complete care in the wilderness.³⁾

From this perspective, one can find a feminine image of God in the Old Testament. A female metaphor of nursing to describe God's care clearly appears in the book of Number 11:1-15. In this pericope, one of the interesting points is that the people in need of food complained and cried out, not directly to God, but to God's appointed leader Moses. The people's dissatisfaction with food and complaint lead Moses to ask a question about his own role as a leader in vv. 10-13. Here the narrator effectively calls the reader's attention into the role of leader and the role of God. Moses strongly appeals to God, "Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?'" (vv. 12-13). Here one can easily see in Moses' appealing question that the two themes, *food* and *the role of leader*, are intertwined throughout the passages.⁴⁾

Another interesting point is that the narrator uses a maternal image and the female metaphor of nursing in Moses' appealing questions. In a series of rhetorical questions, the narrator uses the feminine metaphoric terms, conceived (hrh), give birth (dly), nurse (!mah), sucking (qnyh), and

2) L. Juliana M. Claassens, *God who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

3) *Ibid.*, 2.

4) Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 206.

bosom (qnx). These terms cause the reader to imagine that the role of leader in this context is based on the maternal image. Of course, the verb, nurse (!mah) can be problematic because it is masculine in its form. However, this verb directly links with the sucking child and the context in the previous line, "did I conceive all this people?" so that the nurse has to be understood as a feminine meaning.⁵⁾ From this point, Moses sees his given role as the substitute mother or a nurse for God's children. However, he is denying this role as the substitute mother with strong appeal to God. Actually, here Moses is realizing that he is not able to feed them by himself; and he is complaining that God is not fulfilling his duties as mother. His rhetorical question indirectly urges God to step in and fulfill God's maternal duties as the real mother by providing food and care.⁶⁾ Namely, Moses is complaining that this is not his job, but God's. Ultimately, God takes his duty and fulfills the function as a mother, providing food sufficiently. In this regard, Claassens affirms that this passage describes God as the one who functions as a mother and the one who nurses Israel by providing enough food for each day.⁷⁾ God appears as a mother, described by the female metaphor of nursing, and God's provision of manna for the life of the Israelites in the wilderness can be regarded as a maternal duty of God.

God's maternal image is also found in Deuteronomy 32:7-14, which presents the evidence of God's caring fidelity toward Israel. This passage is dominated by a rich series of verbs with God as active subject: fixed, sustained, shielded, cared, fed, guided, set, nursed all are applied to Israel's well-being in the wilderness.⁸⁾ In v. 13, "[God] nursed him with honey from the crags, with oil from flinty rock." Interestingly, the verb, qny means nurse or sucking an infant at mother's breast again. The verb nurse qny is the same in Numbers 11:12, sucking child which represents God's maternal metaphor of nursing. Also it is the same verb "nurse qny" in Exodus 2:9; Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "take this child and *nurse* it for me." Here one can realize that Deuteronomy 32:13-14 describes God's caring fidelity with the maternal metaphor of nursing. In the wilderness, Israel, even Moses, was not able to secure their daily life and future. The only way to live was to trust God fully for each day's food, totally relying on God, as a baby has to be reliant on the mother. A female metaphor of a mother nursing her child is a fitting illustration to understand Israel's religious imagination to see God who provides the manna in the wilderness. In this regard, Numbers 11 and Deuteronomy 32 not only represent the feminine dimensional image of God as a mother well, but also give the reader a crucial hint to interpret and understand the history of God's provision of food in light of the maternal image of God who nurses and feeds as mother. From this perspective, although some other texts referring to God's provision do not use a feminine lexical form, the reader can apply the maternal duties of God who feeds and nurses to those texts. Thus, when God provided the manna and quails (Num. 15:1-11; Exod. 16:1-36) in the wilderness, it can be understood that God is taking his duty and fulfilling a function as a mother of Israel.

5) Ibid., 210. Of course, it is possible to interpret this passage with the image of Moses as a "foster father." But Ashley gives a favor the usual translation, nurse as a feminine meaning.

6) L. Juliana M. Claassens, *God Who Provides*, 6.

7) Ibid., 7.

8) Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 279.

2. The Female Wisdom who provides the foods

The feminine metaphor of God's provision of food also can be found in the wisdom traditions. Especially, Proverbs 9:1-6, which presents a scene that Wisdom prepares a luxurious banquet and invites people to come to share in her bread and drink of wine. Grammatically, from the beginning of the Proverbs, the subject "Wisdom is a female entity."⁹⁾ In the chapter 9, the female Wisdom builds a house having her seven pillars (v. 1), which signifies completeness, perfection with knowledge (Proverbs 24:3-4), or affluence.¹⁰⁾ She herself "slaughtered her animals," "mixed her wine" and set the table (v. 2) for preparing a feast. The text describes what the female Wisdom is doing with special emphasis that all foods and feasts are prepared by herself. Then, she "sent out her servant-girl" for an open invitation and said "come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed" (vv. 3-5). The female Wisdom then explains the meaning of her invitation and having foods, (v. 6) and reinforces her exhortation: Wisdom as a gift of God and a gift of life; "for by me [wisdom] your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life" (v. 11).

The female Wisdom clearly presents that the foods in her feast are not simply for hunger and wine for thirst, but for the gift of life. With three imperatives, "come," "eat," and "drink" in vv. 5, 6, and 11, the female Wisdom proclaims that if the guests eat her food and wine she mixed, and if any one participates in her feast, they will receive the gift of life. Leo Perdue affirms that the female Wisdom invites the unlearned to come "to enjoy not a literal meal of meat and spiced wine but rather a festival of life" with wisdom.¹¹⁾ Further, the life given by Wisdom here does not mean just human life, but a life with Wisdom and with God. Michael Fox argues that listening to wisdom, living within her house, and participating in her feast represent and envision a "life time of learning" with God.¹²⁾ Here, eating the foods signifies the gift of new life and God's wisdom. In this regard, the female Wisdom not only presents her gifts of food as the content of wisdom of God, but also she reveals as provider of foods of wisdom for the life. Namely, the female Wisdom is described as the one who provides a special food for the people's new life, as God provided the foods for the life of Israelite in the wilderness.

Furthermore, in this passage, the female Wisdom is described as "hostess,"¹³⁾ who is in charge of the preparation of the food and the place for feast. Here one can see the maternal image of the female Wisdom. The metaphorical invitation of this passage can be compared with Isaiah 55:1-2¹⁴⁾ in terms of giving life¹⁵⁾: "everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have

9) Judith E. Mckinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 46.

10) "Seven" is a round or typological number. This number usually connotes completeness or appropriateness. The pillars of Solomon's temple had seven meshwork decorations (1 Kings 7:17). See, Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 297.

11) Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs - Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 151-152.

12) Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 297-298.

13) Judith E. Mckinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host*, 38-80.

14) Michael V. Fox, *Proverb 1-9*, 299. See also, Judith E. Mckinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host*, 52-55.

15) In terms of giving life, the image of God who prepare a table can be find in Psalms 23:5; 146;

no money come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." In this passage, like Proverb 9:1-6, imperatives "come," "buy," "eat," make the subject the host who is in charge of the preparation of the foods. Interestingly, the foods are remarkably free. God as the host invites people with his bountiful gifts of food and wine, and he reminds the people of his promise of returning home from exile (Isaiah 55:3-13). The foods that God offers are not for the appetite of people, but for the promise of the gift of new life. In this regard, the foods as the life with God in Proverb 9 can parallel with that of God's provision of food in Isaiah 55. From this perspective, Claassens sees that Proverb 9 and Isaiah 55 use gifts of food as a symbol of God's word to invite the people to enter into a life with God.¹⁶⁾ At this point, God in Isaiah 55 can be identified with the female Wisdom in Proverb 9 in terms of the host who provides the foods and invites people into the life-giving feast. As a female figure the Wisdom, the hostess can associate with God's maternal images, feeding and nursing. When the female Wisdom provides the foods for the life of the people, it also evokes the reader's mind to the female metaphor of God who feeds and nurses for the life of people in the wilderness. In this regard, as the hostess who invites people to come to share the foods, the female Wisdom and her role can be described with the maternal image like the metaphor of God as mother who feeds and nurses for life.

III. The Image of Jesus as Mother who Feeds in John 6

1. Jesus feeds five thousand: *taking maternal duties*

Jesus' feeding narrative (6:1-15) in the Fourth Gospel begins with the retrospective phrase, "after these things, meta. tau/ta," and the information of Jesus' location: "the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias" (v1). Then the narrator places Jesus on "the mountain, to. o:roj" (v.3) with the description of the large crowd following Jesus (v.2). Here the narrator is setting to reveal Jesus' identity and its image by comparing him with Moses. In verse 3, the use of the definite article, "the mountain, to. o:roj" indirectly signifies that Jesus' position is parallel to that of Moses who received the Law (Exod. 19:20; 14:1-2; Isa. 34:2-4).¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, the very beginning of this narrative, the retrospective phrase, meta. tau/ta immediately makes the reader connect to the previous narrative in which Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath and rebukes the Jews (5:2-47).¹⁸⁾ Here Jesus claimed that he is more authoritative than Moses (vv. 46-47) because Moses had testified to Jesus in his writing (v. 46). At this point, the narrator leads the reader to consider whether Jesus is similar to Moses or Jesus is more authoritative than Moses is.

Furthermore, in light of the theme of the feeding of multitude, the reader is reminded of the manna and quails that God provided in the wilderness, in which Moses took his role as God's

Proverbs 9; Isaiah 25:6. See, Judith E. Mckinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host*, 55.

16) L. Juliana M. Claassens, *The God who Provides*, 88.

17) Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina Series Vol 4; Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 195.

18) Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 67.

agent. Interestingly, the narrator kindly explains that the time was near "the Passover, the festival of the Jews" (v. 4), which alludes to the wilderness stories in Exodus 12-17. So, the reader can recall not only the Passover meals, but also all other experiences including the manna and quails that God provided. In this regard, Webster argues that these allusions to the experience of the Exodus symbolically represent "Jesus as one who provides food for the people."¹⁹⁾ One of the important points is that Jesus who feeds the multitude in John does not correspond to Moses, but to God who provided foods in the wilderness because Moses was not the real provider of the foods. It means that the image of Jesus can be overlapped with God's image in the wilderness. The location of the mountain supports this idea. The setting of the mountain evokes various narratives in the biblical tradition. For example, on the mountain, Moses encounters God in a burning bush (Exod. 3:1-4:17), he receives the law (Exod. 34:15-18), Elijah hears God's small voice (1 Kings 19:8-18), and Mount Zion is recognized as God's dwelling place, and is even the transfiguration narrative in Matthew 17. So, by situating the narrative on the mountain, the narrator and the reader usually expect some kind of theophany.²⁰⁾ So in the narrative setting in John 6:1-15 with "the mountain to. o:roj," the reader may identify Jesus with God in a special expectation of a kind of theophany, which corresponds to the Jews saying Jesus is "equal to God" (5:18).

When Jesus saw a large crowd coming to him, he said to one of his disciples, Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (v. 5). At this moment, one cannot but raise the question, Why did Jesus have to worry about the food for feeding the crowd? In contrast to the synoptic narratives of the feeding multitude (Mark. 6:35-37; 8:4; Matt. 15:33), Jesus initiates the concern about how to feed the crowd coming to him, it is not initiated by the disciples. None of the crowd asked Jesus to give some food. No one worries about whether the people eat or not at this moment except Jesus. In most human experience, this kind of worrying to feed someone is usually a mother's duty. Here Jesus seems to take the duty of mother. Furthermore, the question of Jesus (v. 5) alludes to Moses' asking to God in the book of Numbers 11:13:²¹⁾ "Where am I to get the meat to give all these people?" As I see before, Moses' appeal to God in Numbers 11:12-13 paradoxically reveals God's maternal duties to feed his children. Here Jesus' asking reminds the reader of God who fed and nursed and his maternal duties in the wilderness. The narrative explains that the question was to test Philip (v. 6). Some scholars see that this test is about the faith of a disciple. Other scholars claim that the test can be parallel with Exodus 16:4 where God tests Israel with manna.²²⁾ However, in my reading, Jesus is testing Philip and the disciples whether they know Moses' appeal to God in Numbers 11:13, or whether they remember the God who provided the manna and quails in the wilderness or not. Furthermore, Jesus' asking seems not only to test the reader whether they know God's maternal duties or not, but also to evoke the reader's memories about Israel's history with God who fed and nursed in the wilderness.

19) Ibid., 68.

20) Ibid., 68.

21) Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 197.

22) K Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 50.

Jesus finally provides sufficient food for the crowd, as God took his maternal duties in the wilderness. One of the disciples, Andrew finds a solution by drawing Jesus' attention to the boy who "has five barley loaves and two fish" (vv. 8-9). Then Jesus makes the people sit down on the grass, and he takes (e;laben) the loaves, give thanks (euvcaristh,saj), and distributes (die,dwken) them to the people stretched out for the meal, also he distributes the fish (v. 11). People eat, and they are satisfied (v .12), and even the gathering of the fragments are twelve baskets (v. 13). Then, the narrator delivers an interesting reaction of the crowd; after people saw the miracle as the sign that Jesus had done, they said, "this is indeed the prophet who is to come in to the world" (v. 14). Now, people are identifying Jesus specifically as "prophet who has come into the world." The crowd seems to consider that Jesus and his sign correspond to Moses. Or they are looking for a special figure such as a Moses-like Prophet, based on the word of God to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18.²³⁾ However, Jesus realized that they try to make him a king, "he withdrew again to the mountain by himself" (v. 15). The scene that Jesus avoids people in v. 15 indirectly presents that people's expectation and confession are not right. In this gospel, a sign has led people to a limited faith²⁴⁾, as Nicodemus (3:2) and Samaritan woman (4:19; 25). People did not recognize the reality of Jesus as mother who feeds them, as God has done. The feeding of multitude is not corresponded to what Moses had done, but it is identified with God who provided the foods for the people in the wilderness. Namely, as God took his maternal duties for feeding and nursing God's children, Jesus feeds and nurses the people of God.

2. Logos and the discourse on the bread

The feeding narrative in the Gospel of John directly connects to the discourse on the bread of life (6:26-71). The narrator intensifies the portrait of Jesus as true provider of the food and its feminine image. In Jesus' discourse on the bread, Jesus points out the food that he provides as "an alternative nourishment" which is the source of eternal life: *the future gift of the son of Man* (v. 27).²⁵⁾ The bread Jesus gives does not perish but "endures for eternal life" (v. 27) because the bread comes from the Father in heaven (v. 32), not from the Moses. At this moment, the reader can recall "the living water" that Jesus offers in the Samaritan narrative (4:7-15). In fact, the Johannine narrator describes that whoever drinks the living water Jesus provides will never be thirsty and endures for eternal life (4:14). Likewise, whoever eats the food Jesus provides will never be hungry and never be thirsty (5:35). Jesus differentiates his provision from the worldly value of food and presents another dimension of the food as a gift of life. Neither Moses and his manna, nor Jacob and his well will satisfy forever. However, Jesus' provision will lead people into the new world with never-ending satisfaction: *eternal life*. In this regard, Jesus, like the maternal image of God in the wilderness, is strongly described as a true provider of the food for eternal life. At the same time, Jesus affirms that "it is my Father

23) Francis, J Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, 199. As the messianic expectation, Moses-like-Prophet also appears at Qumran (4QTest 5-8; 1QS 9:11).

24) Ibid., 128.

25) Ibid., 209.

who gives you the true bread from heaven" (v. 32). It means that the original source of the true bread is God the Father. In the past, it was God who provided the bread, not Moses (v. 32). Now the same God, the Father gives the true bread from heaven. Here the reader can find two providers of the food: Jesus and God the Father. Jesus as a provider of heavenly food is identified with God the Father who was/is the original provider and source of the food.

Then Jesus explicitly identifies himself with the substance of the food that he provides. When people ask Jesus to give the bread he is talking about, he firmly proclaims that, "I am the bread of life, egw, eivmi o` a;rtoj th/j zwh/j" (v. 35). As a true bread, its source is heavenly, not earthly, and it "gives life to the world" (v. 34). Jesus provides the food that comes down from heaven, and he is the food. Namely, Jesus becomes not only a provider of the bread, but also the substance of the food that God provides.²⁶⁾ With the connection to the Passover setting, some scholars argue that the identification between Jesus and the bread can be interpreted in light of "the Passover lamb," "new manna," or any other deliverance image for eternity.²⁷⁾ However, in my perspective with a literary point of view, Jesus' identification with the bread itself is a strong expression that Jesus is the true provider of the bread of life. Moloney argues that, with all the "I am, egw, eivmi" sayings with a predicate, "Jesus is not describing who he is but what he does: he nourishes with bread that produces life."²⁸⁾ It means that Jesus' "I am" saying symbolically represents that he is providing the bread for the gift of life. For an infant, his or her mother can be recognized as the milk or the substance of the food. Likewise, "I am the bread of life" means Jesus is the true source and provider of the bread and he is the bread. Jesus' identification with the bread alludes to the female Wisdom who provides the food in Wisdom traditions. Barrett argues that, in the phrase, "egw, eivmi o` a;rtoj th/j zwh/j," "I am, egw, eivmi alludes the divine word of self-revelation and of command and the speech of Wisdom in Proverb 8, which shows several usage of the "I, yna."²⁹⁾ So, "I am, egw, eivmi" leads the reader to look back the prologue of the Gospel and the description of lo,goj. Actually, it has long been recognized that the Gospel of John contains elements of the female Wisdom Christology and divine revelation in the prologue. Many Biblical scholars see that not only o` lo,goj could naturally be used in an account of "God's self-revelation: his thought was communicated by his speech,"³⁰⁾ but it also can be connected to Hellenistic Judaism's concept of the female Wisdom (hmkx - *hokhmah*, sofi,a) in Wisdom traditions.³¹⁾ Of course the lo,goj has a different lexeme from sofi,a, and there are few direct inter-textual parallels.³²⁾ However, most

26) Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, 78.

27) *Ibid.*, 77-79.

28) Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 214.

29) C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: S.P.C.K, 1962), 242. For example, Exodus 3:6; 20:2, and the same formula is found in the prophets; Isaiah 51:12. In the case of the Wisdom tradition, see Sirach 24.

30) C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 127.

31) *Ibid.*, 128. In parallel with Proverbs 8:22, the Wisdom of God has ceased to be merely the quality of being wise; Wisdom has an independent existence in the presence of God, and also bears some relation to the created world. See also, Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 42.

32) Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of The Fourth Gospel A Sequential Reading* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 138-141.

scholars focus on the parallels between *lo,goj* and *sofi,a* in light of the idea, a possible inter-textual resonance, and its role and descriptions rather than lexical form.³³⁾ In these studies, the *lo,goj* in the Johannine prologue can remarkably be connected to the female Wisdom, *sofi,a*. The concept of the *lo,goj* is not the major concern of this article, so I am not going to deal with this in detail here. The most interesting point is that the *lo,goj* as the female Wisdom (*sofi,a*), which is identified with Jesus within the Johannine narrative,³⁴⁾ is described as the provider of food for giving the eternal life, as the female Wisdom provides food in Proverb 9:1-6.

Furthermore, Jesus' identification with the bread corresponds to the female Wisdom who identifies herself with the food in Wisdom tradition. As Culpepper suggests, "the reader should see that all that Jesus does and says points to his identity as the divine logos" within the logos frame.³⁵⁾ So, when we see the Gospel with the frame of Logos, we can imagine that Logos/the female Wisdom comes down from heaven, incarnates, and provides the food for the life of the people. In this respect, the Logos/the female Wisdom presents herself as the true and living bread for the nourishment of the believer in this Gospel (6:35). Here Jesus' identification with the bread of life can be connected to the female Wisdom who is identified with the food.³⁶⁾ The female Wisdom in Proverbs 9 is identified herself with the foods she provided; also eating the food, drinking the wine and participating in the feast the female Wisdom prepared signify having the gift of life and the gift of wisdom. At the same time, in Proverbs 9:11, the female Wisdom clearly affirms that "for by me (wisdom) your days will be multiplied." Here the female Wisdom reveals her identification with the foods she made. This means that the Wisdom is not only the provider, but also the substance of the food, herself the Wisdom that people have to take. Other wisdom texts, particularly Ben Sira clearly describe that the female Wisdom calls upon people to eat and drink of her, describing her as the food; "those who eat of me ... and those who drink of me ..." (Sirach 24:21).³⁷⁾ In this regard, the female Wisdom and Jesus appear not only as a provider of the food, but also as the food, provided for the gift of life with God.

Jesus as Logos can clearly be identified with the female Wisdom in light of their role as true providers of food and as the substance of the food for life. In this respect, whether the phrase "I am the bread of life" is metaphorical or revealing the true nature of Jesus, the Johannine narrator is aware of the connection between Jesus/Logos and the female Wisdom who feeds and nurses in the Wisdom tradition.³⁸⁾ Jesus as Logos/the female Wisdom provides the food, at the

33) Scholars try to find connection between Logos and Sophia in parallel between John's prologue and Proverbs 8:22-23, Sirach 1, Wisdom 9:1-2; 7:26 in light of several echoes and images: Torah, Creation, close relationship with God, etc. See, Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 73-141. Also, R. Alan Culpepper sees the divine logos assumes the role which has been attributed to Wisdom in earlier literature. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 106-112.

34) Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 140.

35) R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 107.

36) Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 116-119.

37) *Ibid.*, 117.

38) *Ibid.*, 119.

same time Jesus/ the female Wisdom identifies herself with the substance of the food: *the Bread of Life*. Here, as the female Wisdom recalls God's maternal image as the provider of food, Jesus' identification with the bread (6:35) leads the reader to consider the feminine/maternal image of Jesus in light of the female Wisdom who gives life.

IV. The Continuation of Un-failing Maternal Duty: John 21

1. Jesus and Breakfast: *un-failing maternal love*

Jesus' feeding motif reappears in the final narrative (John 21:1-14) and represents Jesus' un-failing maternal love through the continuation of feeding and nursing his followers. The narrator presents a connecting clue between the narrative of Jesus' feeding of the multitude in chapter 6:1-15 and John 21:1-14. Beginning with a transitional phrase, "after these things, meta. tau/ta," the narrator places Jesus on "the Sea of Tiberia." This location evokes the reader's mind to the previous narrative of Jesus' feeding of the multitude and the Bread of Life discourse, which occurred on or by the Sea of Tiberias (6:1, 23). Furthermore, the Sea of Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee (6:1) so that the reader is reminded also of other miracles in Cana of Galilee (2:1-11) where Jesus offers a great wine, turned by the water. So John 21:1-14 naturally leads the reader's point of view into the Jesus' feeding motif.

The narrator unfolds the story with seven disciples gathered in one place, including Peter and the beloved disciple. Peter makes a decision for something to do: fishing (v. 3). Then other disciples decide to join him. In this moment, one cannot raise a question, "why are they going to fish? Isn't it weird?" Yes! It is weird for the reader who is reminded of the previous chapter 20:19-23; they met Jesus who was raised from the death. They must be encouraged by the risen Jesus, and they have to follow the way of Jesus. But they went fishing. Fishing was the disciples' everyday routine life before they met Jesus. So, it means that they are turning back to their routine life. How is it possible? We are not told any motivation of decision to go fishing in this narrative. Some scholars interpret that their decision to fish corresponds with the mission as "fishers" of people; and others see this scene as an aimless disorientation.³⁹⁾ In my reading, interpretation of the mission to be a fisherman is not reasonable because there is not any previous information and image of the fisherman in this Gospel. Rather, their emotions are very unstable, and they seem not to know what to do, even though they met risen Jesus who is not with them now. Furthermore, there is no obvious commissioning comment or order like Matthew 28:18-20; Jesus just said, "as the father has send me, so I send you" (20:21). For the disciples who had met together and locked the door with great fear in order to avoid the Jews, this kind of commissioning instruction is not strong and quite ambiguous. The disciples appear to be aimless, confused, and disoriented. When Peter decides to go fishing, everyone decides to follow him unanimously.

The fishing result indirectly shows the disciples downhearted emotion: "they caught nothing" (v. 3). Just after daybreak, Jesus suddenly appears and stands on the beach. However, interestingly the disciples did not recognize him (v. 4). Jesus initiates contact as he addresses them as "children, paidi,a," which seems to indicate an intimate relationship or some kind of authority.⁴⁰⁾

39) Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 549.

Jesus never called the disciples as children elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel. When Jesus calls them children, Jesus seems to be described as their patron or parent, particularly mother. Some scholars argue that Johannine Gospel symbolically represents Jesus as mother who gives birth to the community of believers and Jesus' Passion as the pain of the childbirth during mother's labor.⁴¹⁾ In this regard, here the reader can see Jesus appears as a mother of the disciples. Furthermore, the reader can recall God who took his maternal duties in the wilderness, when Moses revealed God's duty to feed his children by complaining appeal (Num. 11:10-13). And the reader may expect Jesus would do something for the children.

Jesus commands the disciples, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat," and he said, "you will find some" (v. 6). Jesus' authoritative instruction reminds of the previous scene that Jesus offered a great wine at Cana, saying "fill the jars with water" (2:7). The disciples finally get "so many fish" that they cannot haul the fishing net. The narrator later notifies the number of the fish, "a hundred fifty-three" (v. 11). The specific mention of "a hundred fifty-three fish" produces so many different interpretations by the readers, but the narrative of the Fourth Gospel itself does not provide any evidence in support of those interpretations. The only thing that we can clearly imagine is that the disciples got sufficient fishes as food for them. Interestingly, here the narrative corresponds to the other two miracles of provision: the wine in the wedding feast at Cana (2:1-11) and the feeding of the multitude (:1-5). In these three narratives, there are similar problems that people have not enough wine, food, and the fish, but Jesus provides sufficient food and causes people to be satisfied. Here the reader realizes that Jesus still appears as the one as a provider who feeds and nurses, even though he finished his work on the cross (19:30). Then, the narrator clearly indicates that the beloved disciple recognizes who the one standing on the beach is, "it is the Lord" (v. 7). It is just right after Jesus provides the fishes to them.

Then, the narrator more clearly reveals Jesus' maternal image, feeding her children. When the disciples get ashore, "they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread" (v. 9). An interesting point here is that the narrator uses the term, "ovya,rion, fish," which is different from the previous usage of the fish "ivcqu,wn, fish" (v. 6, 8, 11). While the narrator describes the fish in the fishing net with ivcqu,wn, the narrator uses ovya,rion, for the fish on the charcoal fire. ivcqu,wn refers to live fish and ovya,rion refers to fish that are prepared for eating.⁴²⁾ ovya,rion is the same word for the fish distributed by Jesus in the narrative of the feeding of multitude (6:9, 11).⁴³⁾ In this regard, Jesus himself cooks the fish for the disciples, who were called as *children* by Jesus, so also the bread. Here the narrator effectively not only makes the reader connect the fish on the charcoal fire to the fish at the feeding of the multitude, but also emphasizes Jesus as the real provider of the food.

Then Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast," as a mother cooks and prepares the breakfast table and calls her children. The disciples were aimless, confused, unstable, and

40) Ibid., 549.

41) Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 135-165. This interpretation also sees that the mother of Jesus to replace the absent of Jesus as mother who gave birth the child in the farewell discourse.

42) Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, 137.

43) Ibid., 137.

disoriented, even though they met the risen Jesus. Now, Jesus re-appears to them. As God took his maternal duties in the wilderness, Jesus takes the same maternal duty, giving the gift of the life again; Jesus feeds, nurses, and encourages the disciples with the fish and the bread that he cooked by himself. The breakfast Jesus provides on the seashore not only provides physical nourishment for the disciples but also deepens the binding relationship between Jesus and the disciples like between mother and children. Jesus is feeding, nourishing, and restoring the life of the disciples. In this regard, Jesus is described as a mother who feeds and nurses her children. In verse 12, the narrator unfolds the story, now none of the disciple dared to ask him, "Who are you? because they knew it was the Lord." When they got many fishes, only the beloved disciple recognizes Jesus. However, now all disciples recognize Jesus, particularly who Jesus is, through Jesus' maternal image. It is just right after the disciples were provided the food, the fish and the bread. Then, Jesus took the bread (*lamba,nei to.n a:rtou*) and gave it to them (*di,dwsin auvtoi/j*), as he did at the feeding of multitude. Jesus is clearly described as the mother who feeds and nurses her children and makes them satisfied; and her feeding and nursing are un-failed and continued, even after she died on the cross, giving herself as the bread of life.

2. Maternal Discipleship

The last narrative (21:15-25) as a real commissioning scene represents that the maternal duties Jesus had taken as a mother of children of God (1:12). In this narrative, the narrator presents a new discipleship in light of Jesus' maternal duties. Namely, feeding and nursing are given as a true discipleship for all followers. The narrator tries to restore the fallen status of the disciples and to present a new discipleship. In the narrative, after breakfast Jesus asks Peter three times with two different verbs with similar meaning,⁴⁴⁾ *avgapa,w* (v.15,16) and *file,w* (v. 17), "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" In Jesus' question, the object of comparison, *ple,on tou,twn* (v. 15) has many different understandings by scholars,⁴⁵⁾ but here the most important point is that Jesus' asking itself indirectly expresses a special intention: *establishing a new discipleship*. Actually, some scholars see this scene as Peter's "rehabilitation."⁴⁶⁾ It is quite reasonable that the three times asking by Jesus not only recalls Peter's denial in the courtyard of the high priest (18:17, 25, 27), but also restores Peter's fallen status by the affirmation of his love, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you" (vv. 15-17). Furthermore, the more interesting point is that Peter's affirmative answers are followed by Jesus' special commands. This means that the rehabilitation of Peter is not just for the restoration, but for establishing a new discipleship:

44) *File,w* does not refer to an inferior kind of love. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 486.

Here, two different verbs seem to signify a perfect love.

45) The last phrase "more than these, *ple,on tou,twn*" could be interpreted in three ways: 1) Do you love me more than these things of fishing tools or fishing? This is asking whether Peter can give up his routine life that makes him comfort. 2) Do you love me more than you love these other disciples? 3) Do you love me more than these other disciples love Jesus? See, Bradford B. Blaine Jr., *Peter in the Gospel of John The Making of an Authentic Disciple* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 161-165; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 486.

46) Bradford B. Blaine Jr., *Peter in the Gospel of John*, 180.

taking a maternal duty.

After each affirmation of his love, Peter is given special commands: "Feed my lambs, *bo,ske ta. avrni,a mou,*" "Tend my sheep, *poi,maine ta. pro,bata, mou,*" and "Feed my sheep, *bo,ske ta. pro,bata, mou.*" With three imperatives, these verses 15-17 present Jesus' real commissioning instruction, which can be connected with the unclear commission in 20:21-23. Actually, the previous commission (20:21-23) is ambiguous for the disciples, "I send you" (v. 21). The narrator does not provide clearer commissioning instruction about their sending: where? what to do? This is a good narrative strategy to make the reader imagine the further information of Jesus' commission. This imagination could be a true discipleship in this Gospel. Now, the commission becomes clear with three imperatives; Jesus sends the disciples (20:21) to feed and to tend the sheep and lambs of Jesus (21:15-17). Here the reader can find a new discipleship Jesus establishes.

The discipleship is based on Jesus' maternal duties, feeding and nursing. The verb *bo,skw* is used in the Synoptic Gospels for describing the feeding of swine (Mark 5:11; Matt 8:30; Luke 8:32; 15:15), and in Ezekiel 34:14, *bo,skw* describes "the administration of spiritual sustenance," with God's promise to feed in the rich pastures of Israel.⁴⁷⁾ The subject of *bo,skw* should be a provider of food and spiritual gifts for feeding and nourishment. Then the narrator uses another the verb, *poimai,nw* in v. 16, which means tending, keeping, watching over a sheep as a shepherd did. Within the functional image of these verbs, the combination of the meanings of two verbs not only corresponds to Jesus' maternal image,⁴⁸⁾ which Jesus feeds, tends, and nurses with the food for the multitude and for the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, but it also reminds the reader of God's maternal duties in the wilderness. In this regard, here Peter is entrusted with the maternal duties that Jesus and God had taken before and are taking even now: feeding, tending, and nursing the children of God. This is the real commissioning scene of the Gospel of John. Accordingly, based on the maternal image that Jesus has revealed, the narrator represents what it means to be Jesus' follower and establishes a new discipleship: feeding and nursing. Furthermore, the Gospel of John reveals that Jesus' maternal duties are un-failed and continued forever. Jesus re-appeared to the disciples and fed them a breakfast on the seashore even though he finished his work on the cross (19:30). Jesus' reappearance signifies that the maternal duties are an un-failed and never finished work. Even now, the disciples are entrusted with these maternal duties as a true discipleship and continue what Jesus has done. From this perspective, the Gospel of John not only describes Jesus as a mother who feeds and nurses, but also sublimates Jesus' maternal duties as a new discipleship.

V. Conclusion

47) Ibid., 166-167. In the LXX, it often refers to the feeding of sheep or lambs (Gen 29:7; 37:12; Isa 5:17; 65:25).

48) This can remind of the Good Shepherd in 10:1-18. However, the image of Shepherd in 10:1-18 is more focused on "tending" rather than "feeding." So, in the context of the Gospel of John, the verbs, "feed" and "tend" in 21:15-17 are closely corresponded to the image of Mather who nurses her children, rather than the image of Shepherd.

The Gospel of John presents a special emphasis on the food Jesus provides: the wine at the Cana (2:1-11), the living water that gives life (4:10-14), the bread and fish for feeding of the multitude (6:1-15), and the breakfast by the shore (21:1-14). In these narratives, the narrator emphatically describes not only Jesus as the one who provides the foods, which signify the gift of life, but also Jesus as the substance of the food he provides: "I am the bread of the life." The image of Jesus as provider of the food corresponds to the God who feeds and nurses for the life of the Israelite in the wilderness. In the Old Testament, the metaphor of God's provision clearly reveals God's maternal image and God's maternal duties to feed and nurse. Evoking the memory of the history of Israel and the maternal image of God, the Gospel of John represents Jesus as mother who feeds and nurses the children of God, offering the gift of eternal life. Jesus takes his maternal duties, as God has taken the responsibility in the wilderness. Furthermore, the Johannine Jesus as logos - associating with the female Wisdom who provides food and gives life with wisdom - intensifies his maternal-feminine image. As the female Wisdom reveals herself as a provider of the foods and the substance of the food, Jesus the logos provides the bread and represents himself as the substance of the bread: "the bread of the life."

From this perspective, the Gospel of John not only represents Jesus' maternal-feminine image, but also describes Jesus as true mother who feeds and nurses, based on the metaphor of God's provision. Impressively, at the end of the Gospel, the Johannine narrator presents Jesus' unfailing maternal love, which continually feeds, nurses and gives the children a new opportunity and new life, through the maternal work of Jesus, preparing a breakfast for the children (21:5) by the shore (21:1-14). Furthermore, Jesus entrusts the maternal duties, which God, Jesus, and the female Wisdom had taken, to the disciples (21:15-17) and even to us. In this respect, the Gospel of John not only describes Jesus as true mother, but also sublimates Jesus' maternal duties as a new and true discipleship. If churches deny women's role and their own ministry, or if churches deny women's ability to preside over Holy Communion and to distribute its consecrated elements, *bread* and *wine*, it would deny Jesus' commissioning instruction and true discipleship. So, I hope, through the re-imagination of what God and Jesus had done, *feeding and nursing*, all churches overcome the androcentric prejudice and all exclusionary boundaries in all ritual practices.

Abstract

This article aims to reconsider the male-oriented concept of discipleship through the re-construction of the feminine image of Jesus in the Gospel of John. In order for transcending androcentric understanding of discipleship and its prejudice, this article will focus on the feminine image of God and its corresponding maternal work of Deity. In the Old Testament, the metaphor of God's provision clearly reveals the maternal image of God who feeds and nurses the children of Israel. Evoking the memory of the maternal metaphor of God's provision, the Gospel of John represents Jesus' messianic image, describing particularly Jesus as the mother who takes the maternal duties to feed and nurse the Children of God; and the fourth Gospel ultimately sublimates Jesus' maternal duties as a new and true discipleship. The article investigates Jesus' feminine image, focusing on two feeding narratives: the feeding of the multitude (6:1-15) and the feeding disciples by the shore after the resurrection (21:1-14).

Key Words: Maternal Duty, Jesus' Feminine Image, God's Provision, Johannine Discipleship, Feeding and Nursing, Feminist Biblical Interpretation

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