

The Roles of Unnamed Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Hope for the Marginal

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Abstract

This article deals with the symbolic character and roles of Jesus' mother in the Gospel of John. While women generally represent the marginalized and the oppressed in the Gospel of John, their roles and positions exhibit momentous meaning. Especially, women's roles and their significant meanings are intensified by comparing them with male characters. In the case of Jesus' mother, her unnamed character is described as the marginalized in the surface level of the narrative. Comparing with male character, however, the Gospel of John represents the unnamed mother as a true believer, a witness, a co-worker, and the mother of new community of believers that Jesus instituted on the cross. Furthermore, the Johannine Gospel gives her authority

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to create a Koinonia of believers. There are no male disciples guiding, correcting, protecting, or dominating her.

This article examines the symbolic roles of Jesus' mother in the first appearance at Cana (2:1-12). Then, it investigates the theological meaning of the location and the roles of Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. Specifically, the article compares Peter's location in the courtyard (John 18:15-18; 25-27) and the position of Jesus' mother under the cross (19:25-27). Then, it deals with the theological meaning of the mother as an unnamed character in terms of "woman."

- **Keywords**

Unnamed Woman, Wedding feast in Cana, Jesus' Hour, the Mother of Jesus, Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Hope for the Marginal

I. Introduction

Feminist interpretation of the Bible has the purpose of shifting our focus from biblical interpretation construed as an ever better explanation of the text to the biblical interpretation as a tool for becoming conscious of structures of domination and for articulating visions. So, feminist biblical interpretation can be named and recognized as engaging in “emancipatory rhetoric.”¹ In fact, the remarkable roles of women in the Bible are manifested by the number of stories in which women appear as protagonist in each narrative unit and express symbolic messages.²

While women generally represent the marginalized and the oppressed in the Gospel of John, their roles and positions exhibit momentous meaning. Women’s roles and their theologically significant meanings are intensified by comparing them with male characters. Compared with the male disciples and their positions, the unnamed mother of Jesus, particularly, represents the symbolic meanings and conspicuous roles, even though she appears just twice at the beginning and the end of Jesus’ ministry. In the Gospel of John, the author gives us the unnamed character of Jesus’ mother, who is called “woman” by Jesus, at the wedding feast of Cana (2:1-12) and at the foot of Jesus’ cross (19:25-27). In these narrative units, Jesus’ mother informs the reader of Jesus’ hour which is the important theme of this Gospel: *the initiative and the ending point of Jesus’ ministry*. In her appearances, the mother not only reveals her own significant role but also delivers

1 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 5.

2 For instance, Matthew 9:18-26; 15:21-28; 21:28-32; 22:23-33; Mark 1:29-34; 5:24-43; 12:41-44; 14:3-9; Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 23:49; 24:1-12; John 4:4-42; 7:53-8:11; 12:1-8, etc.

symbolic meanings and theological messages through dialogue and her location. Here, one can realize diverse meanings and roles that the mother reveals: *as a true believer, Jesus' co-worker, successor of Jesus' ministry, the mother of community of believers, and the center of Koinonia.*

In this article, I am going to examine the symbolic roles of Jesus' mother in the first appearance at Cana (2:1-12), paying special attention to the specific narrative strategies with the feminist perspective. Then, I will investigate the theological meaning of the location and the roles of Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. Specifically, in this part, I will compare Peter's location in the courtyard (John 18:15-18; 25-27) and the position of Jesus' mother under the cross (19:25-27). Then, I am going to deal with the theological meaning of the mother as an unnamed character in terms of "woman."

II. The Mother of Jesus in Cana

1. The Mother's Location in Cana

The location of Jesus' mother can be examined by using two lenses: a socio-cultural and a theological perspective. Here the two lenses show contradictory views to each other. Most of all, in the socio-cultural perspective, the mother's location as a woman generally represents the marginalized and the oppressed in Jesus' time. Many readers who were familiar with the patriarchal culture of Jesus' time would have had the preconception of women's social positions and roles when they read this passage. Some women appear as unnamed characters in the Gospel of John such as Jesus' mother, mothers' sister, the wife of Clopas. Women's unnamed identity indirectly demonstrates

that women's social location was at the margin. It represents that women's identity was not defined by their own being and their ontological values were distorted by androcentric prejudice.

Remarkably, however, the location of Jesus' mother in the narrator's description reveals significant narrative strategy, placing the mother close to where Jesus is: "the mother of Jesus was *there*" (v. 1, καὶ ἡ μητήρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ). Namely, the mother is not defined by her social location but by the preposition, *ἐκεῖ* in this narrative, which represent her role in Jesus' first ministry. The author is dragging the unnamed mother into the beginning of Jesus' ministry through this phrase. In this location *ἐκεῖ*, it is remarkable that the mother appears as an active speaker who seems to argue with Jesus about his hour (ῥα). Although Jesus' disciples are also invited to the celebration, they seem to be passive in this scene. However, the mother plays a significant role. Obviously, the author presents the fact that Jesus' mother is closely and actively "there" at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, even though his mother appears just twice in this Gospel. Furthermore, the mother follows Jesus after the first sign in verse 12. The author keeps her location near Jesus and where he is going, "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother" (v. 12). This indirectly indicates that the mother will not be separated from the destiny of Jesus' ministry, foreshadowing mother's appearance even at the scene of Jesus' cross.

2. The Mother's Expectation and Jesus' Rejection

The narrative of the wedding feast in Cana begins with the appearance of Jesus' mother, in which the author's narrative strategy is exposed. The narrator explains that Jesus and his disciples are invited, and so is his mother. In the middle of feast, Jesus' mother approaches

to Jesus with great expectation, saying that “they have no wine” (v. 3). Why is the mother especially concerned, and why does she express this Jesus? She is obviously not the master of this feast but just a guest. However, she is asking Jesus to do something for this wedding feast. At this point, the reader may not get any hint about what will happen because there is no evidence of any previous mission performed by Jesus in this gospel; and there is no description that the Messiah would have led people to expect him to work miracles on behalf of individuals, even in Old Testament.³ In this regard one can imagine that his mother not only already knows everything about Jesus’ identity and what he would do, but also her expectation has a special intention to represent the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

The mother’s expectation, however, is rejected by Jesus’ firm answer: “What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (v. 4, Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου). Interestingly, the mother’s expectation causes Jesus’ words of “my hour (ἡ ὥρα μου),” which is the technical term referring to the passion, death, and resurrection in Johannine gospel.⁴ In this perspective, the author obviously tries to reveal Jesus’ hour, which signifies his final destiny, at the moment of the opening of his ministry, and it also expresses Jesus’ initial glorification through the mother’s expectation. Thus the mother’s expectation and her appearance play an important role which thoroughly intends to represent Jesus’ hour literarily and leads Jesus to perform his first sign.

Some scholars argue that the mother’s request and the following re-

3 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 1-12* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 98.

4 *Ibid.*, 99-100.

jection allude to Eve's request for Adam to eat the forbidden fruit in Genesis.⁵ They argue that the mother misunderstands Jesus' hour and makes her request like Eve, but Jesus dissociates himself from his mother through rejection. This hermeneutic approach devalues the role of Jesus' mother in this narrative. However, the obvious fact is that Jesus finally agrees to fulfill his mother's request. It means what Jesus is trying to get at is not a rejection or dissociation from his mother, but a representation of his hour and an indication to others of the opening of his ministry. Therefore, the mother's request is not a misstep; and it does not make her the same with Eve but effectively exhibits who Jesus is and what he would do. In other words, through the mother's expectation, Jesus reveals that although his hour is not yet come, the hour has already begun in his first sign.

The mother's expectation and Jesus' rejection are brought into harmony to initiate Jesus' ministry. In this perspective, the mother's appearance reveals two functional roles: *believer* and *co-worker* who inform the beginning of Jesus' hour. First, the mother seems to have no doubt that Jesus will intervene and perform a miracle, even though there is no previous miracle performed by Jesus. She believes in Jesus before any sign that manifests who Jesus is. In this regard, she appears as a mysterious believer and the first believer in this gospel. Second, the mother functions as a co-worker who informs the reader about Jesus' hour and the beginning of his ministry. The mother's expectation functions as the catalyst that enables Jesus to reveal his identity and the true meaning of his life to his disciple and readers. Namely, Jesus' mother causes Jesus to refer to his "hour," which has special

5 Raymond E. Brown, eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (New York: Fortress, 1978), 188-192.

meaning in this gospel, and she leads Jesus to initiate his ministry with the first sign. Here the mother functions as a co-worker who helps Jesus initiate his ministry.

3. The Mother's Persistence

After Jesus has rejected his mother's expectation, she says to the servants, "do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). It reveals that the mother does not give up her expectation and belief. The mother's attitude and unceasing expectancy reminds the reader of Synoptic examples of a woman's persistence in the face of seeming rejection by Jesus (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).⁶ These Synoptic examples show a woman's wretched situation and the persistence of belief after Jesus' flat refusal. Such persistence always seems to cause Jesus to act, so that Jesus finally accepts the woman's petition and praises the woman's faith rather than decrying her.⁷ Jesus states, "Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish" (Matt 15:28).

6 Raymond E. Brown, eds., *Mary in the New Testament, 193-194*. See also, Elaine M. Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 635-677.

7 In the case of the Canaanite woman narrative in Matthew, Gail O'Day argues that the woman's resilience of faith and her daring words correspond with the petitioning cries for deliverance in Israel's lament psalms. She observes that, as lament palmists boldly address, complain, petition, and present motivations to God with reasons for why God should act, woman bravely approaches, addresses and present motivation to Jesus with reasons for doing what he was supposed to do. Gail R. O'Day, "Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman," in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 114-125. See also, Frances Taylor Gench, *Back to the Well: Women's Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1-28; Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction in Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Elaine M. Wainwright, *Toward a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1991).

From this perspective, the narrative of a wedding feast in Cana seems to parallel the story of persistent women in the Synoptic Gospels. The narrative involves a refusal of the petitioner and a persistence which finally brings the acceptance of the request. Jesus finally supplies the wine requested by his mother: *the first sign*. Actually, it is difficult to decide if the miracle is a response to his mother's persistent faith or not. However, it is enough that the mother's words: "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5), exhibits her persistent faith and reminds the reader of persistent woman in other gospels. In this regard, the mother of Jesus is described as a great believer, like the persistent woman in the Synoptic Gospels, whom Jesus praises saying, "Great is your faith."

III. The Mother at the Cross: Comparison of Peter and Jesus' Mother

The mother's second appearance is in the passion narrative. In this scene, the theological meaning and roles of Jesus' mother can be enhanced by comparing Peter's location and his attitude with those of Jesus' mother.

1. Peter in the Courtyard

1) Peter's Location

In the passion narrative, Peter's locations represent an ironic contradiction between social perspective and theological view similar to those of the mother's location. This contradictory view leads us to find a significant concealed meaning of the gospel. First of all, one can see that his social location basically represents his authority as Jesus' male

disciple. The readers who knew the story of the Synoptic Gospels well have a preconception of Peter and would regard Peter as Jesus' best disciple, who has a special authority. Especially compared to women as marginal in Jesus' time, Peter's masculinity enriches the meaning of Peter's social position as an authoritative disciple.

On the other hand, Peter is theologically placed as the outsider in this narrative. The author describes Peter's location stating, "he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest" (18:15, συνεισῆλθεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὴν αὐλὴν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως), but Peter was standing outside at the gate, "τῇ θύρᾳ ἔξω" (v. 16). The word *auvlh* in verse 15 can refer to a palace building or to an open courtyard. According to Brown, the meaning of *auvlh* as courtyard is apparently intended by all Synoptic Gospels when they use the term for the site of Peter's denials.⁸ Actually, the Synoptic Gospels have Peter sitting in the courtyard, and Mark and Luke also mention a fire burning in the courtyard for warmth. In these narratives, one can assume that the courtyard is part of the high priest's house and outside (Matt 26:58; Mark 14:66; Luke 22:54-55).

The Synoptic Gospels did not mention the exact location of the courtyard as "outside." However, the author of the Gospel of John obviously and intentionally states Peter's location, standing "outside at the gate" (τῇ θύρᾳ ἔξω) in verse 16. The term "outside" indicates the opposite site to Jesus' interrogation which took place inside (18:19-24).⁹ Here Peter is undoubtedly pictured as an outsider in the court-

8 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 13-21* (The Anchor Bible; New York : Doubleday, 1981), 823.

9 Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis : Fortress, 1998), 253.

yard near the gate, while Jesus is interrogated inside. Accordingly, in this narrative Peter's location theologically and literally reveals him as an outsider, standing with the opponents of Jesus.

2) Passive Peter

One of the interesting features of this narrative is the fact that Peter gained admission to the high priest's courtyard only through the unnamed "the other disciple who was known to the high priest" (v. 16). At this part, the reader cannot exactly know who the other disciple is. There are diverse opinions as to whether the other disciple is to be equated with the beloved disciple.¹⁰ However, the most significant thing is the use of the other disciple, that is unnamed character, to secure Peter's admission into the courtyard, whether the other disciple is the beloved disciple or not.

Furthermore, this admission is given by the woman who guarded the gate. This woman appears in all of the gospel accounts of Peter's first denial, but John alone specifies her work at the gate. Many scholars have expressed doubt that a woman would be allowed to tend the gate of the high priest's house, especially at night.¹¹ This indicates that the author probably turned the originally undefined or masculine gate keeper into a woman to harmonize with the presence of a woman at Peter's first denial in the Synoptic tradition. In this perspective, Peter's character is evidently portrayed as having a passive attitude, led by another unnamed disciple and a woman gatekeeper in the Gospel of John.

10 Robert Kysar said that "another disciple" in v. 15 is often identified with the beloved disciple. Robert Kysar, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: John* (Minneapolis :Augsburg, 1986), 272. See also, Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John 13-21*, 822-823.

11 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John 13-21*, 824.

3) Peter's Denial

The woman asked Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" (v. 17). This kind of question normally anticipates a negative answer. Peter immediately answered, "I am not." This denial corresponds to Jesus' previous avowal,¹² "I am he" (18:5, 6, 8). Namely, Peter's answer, "I am not" (οὐκ εἰμὶ) in v. 17 and 25 is the negative counterpart of Jesus' confession, "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι). Through this narrative, the readers arrive at an interesting contrast between Jesus' confession of who he is in defense of the disciples and Peter's denial that he is a disciple.

Peter's denial narrative appears one more time after the high priest's interrogation of Jesus in this gospel; "Peter was standing and warming himself" (v. 25). This is a repetition of v. 18, which reinforces Peter's firm location and position as an outsider, and it connects the second and third denial. He denied Jesus and said, "I am not," which is redundant, perhaps for emphasis. It is clear that Peter's denials are juxtaposed to Jesus' situation. While Jesus is faced with the real danger of death and yet does not compromise the truth, poor Peter cannot even admit to having been a disciple of Jesus.¹³ Therefore, in this narrative, one can discover that Jesus is standing firm against the religious authorities while at the same time Peter cowardly denies that he is Jesus' disciple.

2. The Mother of Jesus at the Foot of Jesus' Cross

The Gospel of John 19:25-27 presents the scene at the foot of Jesus' cross. All of the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' death agree that it is the

¹² Bruce J. Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 253.

¹³ Robert Kysar, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament*, 274.

women who keep vigil at Jesus' death. Jesus predicted that all the followers would abandon him at his death, scattering to their own homes. The women, however, stand firm at the foot of Jesus' cross. The author of the Johannine gospel emphasizes this by including the mother of Jesus in this women's group.

1) The Mother's Location at Cross

As we studied above, the mother's social location reveals her as a part of the marginalized and the oppressed. In this narrative, however, Jesus' mother is placed near the cross of Jesus (19:25) with the other un-named women and Mary Magdalene. In v. 25, the women's location is again "near (παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ)" the cross where Jesus is. Although the all gospels speak of women at the cross, there is a difference between the Synoptic Gospels and John. Clearly, the Synoptic Gospels not only exhibit that the women's location is distanced from Jesus' cross, but also omit the presence of Jesus' mother at the cross (Matt 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49). In the case of Lukan Gospel, the narrator states, "they stood at a distance" (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν Luke 23:49). However, John includes Jesus' mother in women's group and describes women standing close to Jesus' cross during the crucifixion (19:25). So, the location of Jesus' mother is "near the cross of Jesus" (παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ v. 25). Here the mother's location precisely corresponds to Peter's location, "outside."

2) Jesus' Mother and the New Community: "here is your mother"

The Gospel of John listed four women at the cross - Jesus' mother, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene - as the witnesses to Jesus' death. In the scene of Jesus' death, the author inten-

tionally put these women, who are socially located as marginal, at Jesus' cross in order to present significant messages. These messages derive from Jesus' farewell discourse at the cross. Specifically, Jesus' mother stands there with the other women and the beloved disciple (19:25-27). Jesus' speaking to the two anonymous people gives profound messages. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son" (γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου v. 26). Then he told the disciple, "Here is your mother" (Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου v. 27). This dialogue accompanies the comment, "from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (v. 27).

In this scene, Jesus' mother has a significant role as a mother of the new community that Jesus made on the cross. Jesus obviously acknowledges his mother and makes her the mother of "the beloved disciple" in verse 26, and that disciple becomes the son of his mother (19:25-27). Namely, Jesus' mother received a new son at the cross. First of all, the reader discovers that Jesus' final work is to constitute a new family, with a special relationship between mother and son. As Brown states, when Jesus' hour has come at the cross, Jesus employs a "revelatory formula,"¹⁴ ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. Furthermore, like a marriage declaration, Jesus' performative language and proclamation accomplish the new relationship to God as a new family.¹⁵ Actually the Gospel of John has employed the metaphor of kinship to characterize the new relationship of believers to God, "children of God" (1:12; 11:52).¹⁶ In this

14 In this formula the one who speaks is revealing the mystery of the special salvific mission that the one referred to will undertake; thus, the sonship and motherhood proclaimed from the cross are of value for God's plan and are related to what is being accomplished in the elevation of Jesus on the cross. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John 13-21*, 923-924.

15 R. Alan Culpepper, "The Theology of the Johannine Passion narrative: John 19:16b-30," in *Neotestamentica* 31 (1997), 30.

16 *Ibid.*, 30.

perspective, the disciples have now become Jesus' brother and sister, at the same time the new family has been constituted through the mother of Jesus.

Second, the formation of a new family at the cross represents the new community of believers centered on Jesus' mother as a true believer. The Gospel of John has a favorable narrative of some believers who are marginalized in religious and social backgrounds; and the mother of Jesus and the women at the cross symbolize those believers' groups. They embody people who have faith in Jesus and have been with Jesus from the beginning to the end.¹⁷ Particularly, Jesus' mother represents the true believer who knows the power and the identity of Jesus from the beginning at Cana to the end, standing near Jesus' cross. In the Johannine perspective, the true believer is inevitably identified with Jesus' mother.

Third, in the formation of the new community, one can discover another symbolic message, *Koinwni*,^a so that the mother becomes the center of *Koinonia*. John Rena suggests that Jesus' message from the cross must interpret *Koinonia* as a "revelatory formula"¹⁸ with special relevance to a community. He states that Jesus' incident becomes a prophetic action visualizing Jesus' prayer for unity in the Gospel of John chapter 17.¹⁹ The action illustrates well the meaning of the words, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one" (17:11). From this perspective, Jesus' constituting on the cross a new community through

17 John Rena, "Women in the Gospel of John," in *Eglise Et Theologie* 17 (1986), 137.

18 *Ibid.*, 135.

19 *Ibid.*

his mother and beloved disciple reminds the reader of the *Koinonia* of believers in a new community. Jesus' mother becomes a center of *Koinonia*.

3) The End of Jesus' Ministry and Following

Jesus' mother presents the ending of Jesus' ministry at the cross, as she informed the reader about "the hour" and the beginning of Jesus' ministry before (2:1-12). When Jesus says to his beloved disciple in reference to his mother, "here is your mother," he completes his ministry. Namely, Jesus finishes his ministry with the constitution of a new community in some performative words: "here is your mother." The narrator states, "after this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said I am thirsty" (v. 28). At this point, Jesus' mother reminds the reader of Jesus' hour again. Namely, the mother functions as not only an initiator but also a terminator of Jesus' ministry in this Gospel.

Furthermore, the mother seems to function as a successor of Jesus' ministry with the beloved disciple. The fact that Jesus makes a new family through the mother and beloved disciple means that although his life is completed, his ministry is not finished yet. Besides, Jesus' utterance of "here is your mother" means that the mother's primary role would not be a physical motherhood but a significant role as a *successor* who is related to Jesus' ministry. So, in this scene, Jesus hands his ministry over to the community of believing disciples through his mother and beloved disciple. Jesus' completion of his work involves the bringing into existence of Christian community. From this perspective, Jesus' mother appears as a successor or a co-worker of Jesus in this Gospel.

3. Comparison of Peter and the Mother of Jesus

The symbolic meanings of the mother's appearances in the passion narrative are revealed manifestly in the Gospel of John, when we compare it with Peter's character. Even though Peter represents authority as a male and Jesus' disciple in the light of a socio-cultural view, the author places Peter on "the outside" of the courtyard, which is on the opposite site from Jesus interrogated "inside." However, although Jesus' mother as a woman usually would have been regarded as the marginal and the oppressed in social and cultural views at Jesus' time, Jesus' mother is central and stays near the foot of Jesus' cross. The most interesting point is that the two scenes appear opposite each other in the same narrative. The mother's position and Peter's location are symbolically reversed; and it exhibits that all women, represented by Jesus' mother, are no longer marginal for Jesus.

In addition, Peter's denial, "I am not," precisely corresponds with Jesus' confession in front of the high priest. This reinforces Peter's negative character, and his theological location becomes further away from Jesus' position. Jesus' mother at the cross, however, represents the witnesses of Jesus' death and the new family Jesus made. The mother of Jesus, other women, and the beloved disciple at the cross appear as true disciples of Jesus' new family, even though they are unnamed characters.

All women, including the mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John, especially in the passion narrative, are presented positively and in intimate relationships with Jesus. There are no women characters that have been shown as resisting Jesus' ministry, failing to believe, deserting him, or betraying him. On the other hand, Peter was depreciated by his passive attitude and position far away from Jesus in this narra-

tive. In this regard, one can assume that the author is intentionally trying to seek to shift the basis of authority from Peter or any historical witness to one whose power depends on the reception of life from Jesus Christ.²⁰ Thus, women represented by Jesus' mother are no longer the marginal in this narrative.

IV. The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John

1. Unnamed Woman

The appearance of Jesus' mother has a significant role and theological function in the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, her name is never given. Matthew, Mark, and Luke named "Mary, the mother of Jesus," but John is the only one who does not give her name and records her presence as Jesus' mother. Furthermore, even Jesus calls his mother "woman" (2:4; 19:26). Brown affirms that it is not an impolite address but Jesus' normal way of speaking to women in his time,²¹ and among Arabian languages, "the mother of X" is an honorable title for a woman who bears a son.²² In this regard, the mother's unnamed character represents typical women who are marginalized in Jewish society. Especially, women's unnamed character demonstrates that women's identity was not defined by their own being but by other male character. Further, their ontological values were not respected, but it has been depressed by androcentric prejudice or male authority

20 Arthur H. Maynard, "The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel," in *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984), 531.

21 Raymond Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 188.

22 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John 1-12*, 98.

However, the unnamed mother receives her theological role as an honorable mother of new people in the hour of Jesus. At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus' mother's intervention is rejected on the ground that Jesus' hour had not yet come, but at Jesus' cross she is in the context of Jesus' hour, as a mother giving birth to new people. Interestingly, the scene at the foot of the cross can be interpreted in connection with John 16:21, the use of the words "woman" and "hour."²³ "When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being in to the world" (16:21). Jesus' mother was refused a role during the ministry of Jesus as it began in Cana, and she received severe anguish of heart under the cross by seeing the death of her son because the hour has come. However, she received her significant role in the hour of Jesus' passion and death. The unnamed woman finally becomes a mother of the beloved disciple and new people. Namely, she symbolically brings forth a new people in joy. Therefore, in Jesus' hour, the unnamed mother of Jesus becomes an honorable mother of new people who are born anew in Jesus' name. Also, new people such as Jesus' brother and sister have a new mother, the unnamed woman.

2. Theological Meaning of Jesus' Mother: Synthesis

First of all, Jesus' mother appears as a true believer, co-worker, and successor of Jesus ministry in the Gospel of John. Jesus' mother reminds us of Jesus' hour and informs the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry. At the wedding feast (2:1-12), through her expectation, she informs the readers that Jesus' hour is coming, an important theme

²³ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John 13-21*, 924-925.

in this gospel and leads Jesus to initiate his ministry with the first sign. Here, she exhibits her persistent faith to remind the reader of the women who were praised by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Furthermore, she always remains the place where Jesus completes his works, so that she becomes not only a witness of Jesus' death but also the mother of new family that Jesus constituted. In these scenes, the mother of Jesus functions as a true believer, Jesus' co-worker, and successor of Jesus ministry.

Second, the mother of Jesus symbolically reveals the mother of the Church. This is based on the fact that Jesus constitutes a new family on the cross through his mother and the beloved disciple. The mother becomes the center of the new family. Many scholars, especially in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, think that she symbolizes the Church. Brown particularly concludes that Jesus' mother is the new Eve, the symbol of the Church.²⁴ He argues that the role of Jesus' mother is in the struggle against the satanic serpent in Jesus' hour like the Eve in Genesis. The mother appears at the foot of the cross and is entrusted with a new family of believers whom she must protect in the continuing struggle with Satan.²⁵ Furthermore, the mother as the new

24 Most of all, the un-named character of the mother of Jesus, especially by calling her "woman", can be seen as a symbolic evocation of the role of Eve in the Eden narrative (Genesis 3:1-24): a New Eve. Actually, the fourth gospel not only begins with the opening words of Genesis, but also exhibits the echoes of Genesis in the prologue. In Genesis, Eve is called the woman, and she struggles with a serpent and instigates Adam to disobey the command of God. Likewise, Jesus' mother is also called "woman" and asks Jesus to use his power. Whether her intention is good or not, her request is rejected by Jesus first. At the foot of the cross, the mother struggles with the death of her son. Here, the mother's character is identified with Eve. However, while Genesis represents the woman's loss against the serpent and the enmity between the serpent and the woman, the fourth Gospel exhibits the woman's triumph with Jesus and becoming a mother of church: Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 98-109; 922-927.

Eve evokes the Old Testament “themes of Lady Zion’s giving birth to a new people in the messianic age.”²⁶ As far as the comparison of the mother with the Eve is concerned, it is quite controversial. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the constitution of new family, the mother of Jesus represents the mother of new community of believers.

Third, Jesus’ mother at the cross has a significant role as a reminder of *Koinonia* in the community of believers. Through Jesus’ mother and beloved disciple under the cross, Jesus constitutes a new family, community of Jesus’ followers, and the *Koinonia* of believers. Robert Kysar insists that in Jesus’ final act before his death, Jesus fulfills what is said about him in the prologue to the gospel: “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (1:12). Here he gives the beloved disciple and his mother power or “authority to create a *Koinonia* of believers who would continue the revelation he had brought to the world.”²⁷ Accordingly, Jesus’ mother at the cross stands as a symbol and reminder of *Koinonia* (fellowship) that Jesus Christ gave us.

V. Conclusion: *Hope for the Marginal*

The mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John has significant roles theologically and symbolically, even though her social and religious position represents the marginalized in the Jewish society. Specifically, the unnamed mother of Jesus represents a conspicuously symbolic

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Robert Kysar, *Preaching John* (Minneapolis : Fortress, 2002), 146.

meaning and significant role, even though she appears just twice, at the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry. The unnamed mother who is called "woman" by Jesus symbolically informs the reader about Jesus' hour, as both the initiative of Jesus' ministry and his ending point of time. Furthermore, the mother's appearances and symbolic character not only represent her own significant roles as a true believer, co-worker, and the mother of community of believer, but also delivers symbolic meanings and theological messages through her own location and position. From this perspective, one can realize diverse meanings and roles that the mother reveals in the Gospel of John through the Feminist perspective: *Jesus' mother as a true believer, co-worker of Jesus, successor of Jesus' ministry, the mother of community, and the center of Koinonia.*

The symbolic character and roles of Jesus' mother in Johannine Gospel would offer special meaning to many women who are feeling themselves as the marginal in our society. Although woman's right have been quiet expanded in these days, women are still struggling with the androcentric perspective, and its relevant social system, even gender-based violence. As we experienced, 'me too movement' and misogynous violence clearly present that women are still not respected by their own existence beyond financial, educational, and any other social status. Misogyny and its relevant sexual violence not only function as a deep principle to reproduce gender discrimination and androcentric boundaries, but they also depress women's ontological values. The most interest thing is the fact that many Korean women still lose their identity and name after marriage in many cases. They are not called by their name; they are identified only as someone's mother or wife, like Jesus' mother in the Gospel of John. In this regard,

the unnamed women in the Gospel of John can be identified with many women, who lose their identity by gender barrier or androcentric prejudice, and any women victims of misogynous social violence.

This identification between vulnerable women in our society and Jesus' mother can give hope to the women who are struggling for finding and justifying one's ontological values. Basically, Jesus' unnamed mother's social location is on the margin at the time of Jesus. Furthermore, she is obviously not a member of Jesus' twelve disciples, and her expectation for Jesus is initially rejected by him. However, in this gospel, Jesus' mother is never marginal theologically, but rather she is recognized as a true believer, a witness, a co-worker and the mother of the new family that Jesus instituted. The mother is presented positively and in a particularly intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus' mother relates to Jesus directly and closely and never through the permission of men. Furthermore, Jesus, as his final work, not only makes a new family and community through his un-named mother at his cross, but also gives her authority to create a Koinonia of believers. There are no male disciples guiding, correcting, protecting, or dominating her. Rather this Gospel affirms that women themselves are true disciples of Jesus, even though they are unnamed and marginal. This affirmation is not based on women's social status, which was constructed by androcentric society; but it affirms the ontological value of women beyond any other androcentric prejudice. In this regard, the identification of the unnamed mother with women in the margin in these days gives hope to the marginal. Although some Korean women are often unnamed too, they can be central to the community of Christ and prove their ontological values beyond any male authority and androcentric prejudice.

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