

The book, *Listen to Your Mother: What She Said Then, What We’re Saying Now*, edited by Ann Imig, is a collection of irreverent, thought-provoking, hilarious, personal stories celebrating motherhood. One such story by Lisa Winstead is entitled “Rules of Engagement.” Winstead says, “Listen to your mother. I always do. But how do I get my kids to listen to me?” she asks. “I would give them directions and they would not listen to me. It was as if they could not hear me. Maybe if I yelled louder, they would hear me and know that this mama meant business.”

On one warm, summer day, Carrie Bedwell snuck out of her home’s back door to water the flowers and to enjoy a rare moment alone. It didn’t last long. “Mom, she’s being mean to me!” one of her kids yelled. “Mom, he touched me!” another one yelled. “Mom! Mom! Mom!” she kept hearing. Winstead lost her cool. She threw down the garden hose and yelled. “I am trying to water my flowers!” To her shock, the hose bounced back into the air and came down with the hard, metal water pistol whacking her daughter in the head. She rushed toward her daughter to apologize and touched the back of her head. There was blood. “What kind of a monster mother am I?” Winstead yelled. “How am I going to explain this to the doctors in the emergency room?” she thought.

“Confession – I have left the house without deodorant on and with eyeliner only on one eye. Multiple times,” writes Melissa Sickinger, who works in the English department at the local High School. “Once, I got to work with my slippers on, and was thankful for the flip flops that were left in the back seat.” Her piece is titled, “Confessions of a Stressed-Out Mom.” “Confession – my boys run my household,” she told a group of moms.

“Confession – sometimes my oldest son calls me Melissa when I don’t answer his first few ‘Mom, mom, mom’ yelps from the other room. I don’t hate it. I realize I am a person, too.”

“Confession – I love when my husband calls me by my first name when our children are around, instead of ‘Hey mom, do you know where the kids’ shoes are?’”

Albert Escobedo, a stand-up comedian, talks about his mother, saying, “I am the man I am today because of my tough Mexican mother. Yes, I’m Mexican, I know it’s hard to tell. I don’t have any neck tattoos, no kids, and no felonies. In my culture, I’m what’s known as ‘el unicorn,’” he joked. Others share stories about adoption, death, and **how to actually get children to listen to their mothers.** (from [chicagotribune.com/davich](http://chicagotribune.com/davich)).

Jesus had trouble getting some people to listen to him too.

In our Scripture today we have the last scene in Jesus’ public ministry which takes place at the feast of Dedication, sometimes called the feast of Lights, or what is better known today

by the Hebrew word for dedication, Hanukkah. It was a time of great hope, marking the national deliverance of the Jewish people. It also celebrated the restoration and purification of the temple, particularly the altar, by Judas Maccabeus three years after its desecration by the Greek general Antiochis Epiphanes in 178 B.C. At this feast people hoped for new beginnings. Expectation filled the air. People wondered, “Is God’s divine deliverer coming at this time to set his people free?”

Earlier conversations and questions are continued into this passage. The main event that has led to this exchange is found back in Chapter 9 where Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth. As John tells the story of this man’s healing, he notes that Jesus’ disciples ask the inevitable theological question of who is to blame for the man’s blindness. Was it the blind man himself or was it his parents? We too are people who always want to know who to blame for bad things. Taking personal responsibility has become sort of a myth in our culture and we usually ask, “let’s see who we can blame?” That makes Jesus’ answer especially worth noting: *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him”* (9:3).

Twice the Pharisees questioned the man born blind about how he received his sight. He told them this about Jesus: *“He put mud on my eyes...and I washed, and now I see”* (9:15). The second time they questioned him they asked *“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”* (9:26). And the man answered, *“I have told you already and you did not listen”* (9:27). So, we can see from the blind man’s answer that the Pharisees were not very good at listening, especially when they weren’t hearing what they wanted to hear. So, the theme of listening is continued into this dialogue even though chronologically it may have been months after the blind man was healed. The sequence is not nearly as important as the thematic connection.

Verse 22 tells us that it is now winter. Jesus moves to the east side of the temple to Solomon’s Colonnade to find shelter from the winter winds. He walked and moved as the rabbis of his day would do when they taught. Now the Jews press in, surrounding him, not so much in hostility it seems as to ask Jesus the central burning question of their existence: *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah tell us plainly”* (10:24).

Bear in mind that these men incessantly pondered and discussed the manner and time of the Messiah’s coming. Facing this strange man who they could neither disregard nor explain they must try to settle the question of his identity once and for all. For if what he was doing and saying was true, there would emerge a new people which could mean the elimination of Judaism as they knew it; and Judaism was their whole life. So, in essence they were asking, “How long will you continue to take away our life?”

But Jesus can only be known as the Messiah through listening and following, not by human proofs. He cannot answer their questions in the way these religious authorities wanted them to be answered. Over and over again, he has urged these people to let his works which have been done in his Father's name bear witness to *who he is*. Healing the man born blind was merely Exhibit A to provide the evidence for them to see *who Jesus is*. But they will not submit to that kind of evidence, so it is impossible for them to listen to his voice and to follow him. They are *not* his sheep.

Have you ever wondered why it seems that Jesus antagonizes the crowds or why he wouldn't speak more plainly? I have thought perhaps because there were different languages being spoken. Even though Aramaic was the common language in Palestine at the time of Jesus, and even though his words have been passed on to us in good English translations, there is a world of perspective that separates Jesus' words from those of his detractors. It is important to remember that John shapes the ministry of Jesus around seven signs (i.e. miracles) that ultimately announce and affirm his divine character to those with the eyes to see. This helps us understand the point of the conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders here in chapter 10. They want Jesus to tell them that he will lead them to victory over their external enemies like the Romans. After all, John tells us that this interaction happens during the Feast of Dedication which recalled the glorious victory of the Hasmonean family, led by Judas Maccabeus, who won independence for the Jewish nation. Now that they were under foreign occupation again, a new Messiah was needed. Many thought that Jesus might be the one, since he seemed to command a following and talked a lot about the kingdom of God.

Jesus, of course, wasn't playing that game. He was speaking very clearly about his person and his purpose, but from an entirely different vantage point. In the events of chapter 9, he had performed a miraculous sign, bringing sight to a sightless man—a miracle which Isaiah declared would accompany the coming of the Messiah (35:5). Moreover, he had just spoken about being the good shepherd and tied his comments to the prophetic insights of Ezekiel 34.

But the greatest hint Jesus was giving about his identity and purpose was in the repeated refrain "*My sheep listen to my voice...*" (v. 27). This was more than just a statement that some people would be followers of Jesus and others would not be. Instead, as John's narration continues in chapter 11, Jesus will actually use his voice to call Lazarus out of the tomb. In this way Jesus publicly shows that he is the good and great shepherd, and that the stakes are far higher than who will win the next election in Palestine. Jesus is the light

of God penetrating this dark foreboding world and restoring life in the face of an insidious and deadly virus called sin that has claimed the entire population of the earth.

It is for this reason that Jesus can make the remarkable declaration of verse 30. *“I and the Father are one.”* This is not unrelated to Jesus’ miracles or other words. It is the central point. Either the Creator is reclaiming the earth and its people through Jesus or Jesus is merely another crowd pleaser with an intriguing bag of tricks.

Interestingly, on the walls of some of the catacombs under the city of Rome where early Christians “buried” their dead, Jesus is typified as holding the lyre of Orpheus. Rather than mixing the ancient Greek myth with their faith, these Christians were instead affirming the hope of that ancient myth and announcing that resurrection could only take place if it is linked to Jesus.

In the tragic love story Orpheus ventures into the land of the dead to attempt to bring back to life his beautiful wife Eurydice who died from a snakebite. Jesus displayed his ability to do just that by raising Lazarus from the dead, accompanied with his promise to raise us from the dead. Lazarus was a sheep stolen away by the bad shepherd—Death. When Lazarus heard the voice of his Master calling him over the chasm that separates the living from the dead, the dead man was able to recover his senses, and his life, just as the blind man recovered his sight.

Some people want Jesus’ miracles without the faith. But it is vital to understand the servant nature of his miracles. They are not the main attraction. Nor are they magical devices that religious people like us can conjure up whenever we want to. If we are to become authentic followers of Christ, we must see the mighty power of God displayed in the miracles of a blind man who sees and a dead man who lives. But we must keep our focus on God, and not become sidetracked like children who think Christmas is all about the toys.

You see, if we merely envision a “god” up there in the sky, detached from the reality of this world that is filled with so many problems and pain, then our following Jesus will have no connection to the Father’s majesty and power. But if Jesus is the lens through which we glimpse the power and beauty of God, we will soon discover that Jesus and the Father are one.

Friends, when we listen to him, we are known by him, and we follow him. Which is truly a miracle of God. Amen.