

The Seven Last Words of Jesus

Jesus said to his mother: "Woman, this is your son."

Then he said to the disciple: "This is your mother." ~Gospel of John 19:26-27

This third saying of Jesus as he hung on the cross, suffering for your sins and mine, turned to what would happen to his family, particularly his mother, after he was gone. In the midst of the suffering the physical pain of spikes being driven through hands and feet, bloody wounds from steel-tipped leather whips, Jesus felt the cross upon which he was impaled slammed into the ground by cruel Roman soldiers, he reaches out to show his love and care for his earthly mother.

Through the mental suffering of being ridiculed, most of his disciples running for the hills, and enduring God's anger as he took on the sins of the world, he saw clearly the pain of his mother who was standing in the midst of this cruel and inhuman punishment. He spoke to his mother, to his young disciple John, and to us as well.

"Woman," he was able to whisper, "this is your son." Pointing out to his mother that this was the one charged with taking care of her after his death, Jesus was able to step out of the situation that seemed to be in complete control of him, and show love and compassion for the one who had loved him the most.

It was a long way from that stable in Bethlehem, the cooing of the tiny baby born to save us all. Far from the words of the angels who sang, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace, good will to men! Decades after the visit of the wise men, of the murder of thousands of tiny babies by the mad king Herod, and the shepherds who watched their flock and went to see what the angels had told them about Jesus.

This was the moment that made peace happen. This death on the cross showed the height of God's love along with the depth of the depravity of men. And one of the greatest loves on earth, the love of a child for his mother, draws a portrait of God's care for you and me, his family forever.

Then he was able to get out a few more words. To John, who often described himself as the one Jesus loved, he breathed, "This is your mother."

That was all he needed to say. He didn't have to say, take care of her, for he knew that a son would do this. He knew that later John, the youngest of the twelve disciples, would take Mary into his own house, with his father Zebedee the fisherman, and that they would have fish dinners on the other side of this moment.

This woman who had rocked him in the cradle had been rocked by the power of God as he chose her for the one and only virgin birth. Mary had been prepped by the angels, amazed by the child and adult Jesus, and she was about to be see that he would rise from the dead and live forever! What mother could ask for more?

Jesus knew that you and I as the family of God, as the church, would take care of each other in moments when the world seems to be pressing on us from every side. He promised that he, as the resurrected Lord would be with us as we told others about

him. And he knew that God the father would continue to work his will despite the drama and sin the world can dream up.

When he said that John was Mary's son, and that Mary was his mother, he was pointing out how we must look past the suffering and pain the world may inflict upon us to the love and healing that only God can work through his people. Centuries of changing diapers, serving breakfast, and sitting at the table through hours of struggles with homework is how this relationship works out.

The family is one of the hallmarks of God's people since the beginning of time. They travel together. They show support, understanding, and forgiveness. They have a bond that can happen in no other relationship. Our mother is always our mother. Our children are always our children.

In these few words, Jesus connects with all those who become a part of his spiritual family. In another place he has already said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

In this loving and far-seeing statement of Jesus, we as God's people can embrace the fact that we are the family of Jesus, and of one another. We travel and celebrate together, we suffer and heal together, we worship and serve together because that is what God's family does.

We are there for one another. Period. When one falls, we pick him up. When one gets too proud, we take him down a notch. When another needs teaching, we teach. Above all, nothing trumps family. Particularly the family of God.