

Seven Last Words From The Cross
Woman, Behold Your Son! Behold, Your Mother!
John 19:26-27

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple, to be presented. While there, Simeon came to them, he held Jesus and sang out the words of the Nunc Dimittis, our post-communion canticle. Luke records what happened next. *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."* (Luke 2:34-35 ESV)

As the nails were driven into her son's hands, Mary probably remembered these words of Simeon, for she had pondered them in her heart. As they pierced His feet, Mary's soul was pierced as well. We sympathize with Mary, what mother should have to watch her Son die.

Mary was not ashamed to be there that day, for she knew the innocence of her Son. Nothing in Him was deserving of such a cruel fate. There was no deceit in His heart or on His lips. Never had there been sin of any kind in His thoughts, words, or deeds. And yet, He suffers a criminal's death. Mary was there that day, and she was remembering the words of Simeon.

Did she also remember her own words she spoke when visiting Elizabeth after learning of her holy pregnancy? Did she remember that she had prophesied that she carried in her womb the Savior of the world, her own Savior? Did she understand that the man suffering before her on the cross was not only her firstborn son, but also God's promised Messiah, the One to redeem Israel and all people? Did she see in the events taking place on that cross, God's mighty arm of mercy and salvation?

Was Mary remembering Simeon's words? Was she remembering her own? Was the Holy Spirit at work in her to put it all together? Simeon was not just talking about a sword piercing Mary's soul because she, a mother, would watch her son suffer in such a ghastly manner. Mary was watching her son suffer for her sins. The sword which pierced her soul was the same one piercing yours – it is the Word of God. When we consider that Christ suffered for our violations of God's Law, the Word pierces our soul, just as it pierced Mary's. She was in tears for the suffering of her son, she was pierced to the heart, for He was dying for her.

While she may have known all these things, she still had a mother's heart, and her heart at that moment was also pierced by the pain and agony visible before her.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (vv. 26-27)

Can you imagine the incredible suffering Jesus was enduring as He uttered these words? He had been beaten, whipped, and was now nailed to a cross. He had to be in incredible pain. Jesus is suffering the bitter agony of His soul...

bearing the weight of the world's sin...,
undergoing the wrath of His Father against the disobedience of every generation...,
bearing in His own flesh the iniquity of us all...
as He is reconciling the world to His Father...
And yet, He is concerned not for His own well-being.

Later, in other words from the cross, we will hear of Jesus' concern for His own physical needs as He thirsts, but even before that, in this text which is our focus for today, His concern is for others. We see His genuine love for

the woman who gave Him earthly flesh. We see His love for the disciple who loved Him so much that he came to watch his Teacher, Friend, and Savior die.

Jesus addresses His mother, “Woman, behold your son!”

Woman? He calls His mother, woman? At first glance maybe this seems cold. Yet consider the tender heart of God in Christ Jesus in these words. So speaks Jesus to His mother, not referencing that relationship in an attempt to spare her further anguish. He had loved His mother as no other son has ever loved a mother before or since. She too had loved Him, with a mother’s heart.

On the cross, we see that His love of her was greater. Jesus’ greatest love toward His mother was not that of a son to a mother, but that of God to one of His beloved children. This simple word of Jesus, calling Mary woman, reminds her that this is greatest relationship of Jesus to her is as Savior to a woman. That is what she confessed in we call the Magnificat.

But there is more, for here on the cross Christ fulfills the fourth commandment in caring for His mother. He saw her there. He understood the bitter pain she was experiencing. But even more than a mother watching a son die, she was a sinner watching her Savior suffer for her sin – yes, a sword pierced her own soul – her sins put her son on the cross. But even as God, to whom all things are possible, He could not remove the bitter cup of woe she endured in watching the Child she bore in her bosom suffer death. He had to die! He had to die for her sake, and for the welfare of all mankind.

On the cross, He fulfills His duty as a son according to the 4th Commandment, and makes sure that she is cared for. Even in His last hours and in His suffering, Christ is fulfilling that Commandment in our stead. He provides another to care for his mother. Joseph, her husband, had already died. As the firstborn, it was Jesus’ duty to provide for His aging mother’s welfare. Who better to do this than the one, of all his friends, who braved persecution and possible arrest to be there at His darkest hour, John. And so Jesus gives his mother into John’s care, and tells her the relationship she is to cultivate with him, “behold your son!”

Lest there be any confusion that this is what He is doing, He also turns to John, the disciple whom He loved, and says, “Behold, your mother!”

John’s birth mother is also there, Mary’s sister, Salome, so there is already a familial connection. Now, Jesus gives His mother into the care of John, rather than into the care of His own brothers, who at the time do not believe in Him.

Jesus’ concern here is for a new relationship to begin between Mary and Himself, that of Savior to woman. Christ shows us the relationships that He deems as most necessary – a relationship with God by faith – and then, the loving relationships that believers are to have toward fellow believers. In fact, by Jesus’ action of not giving His mother into the care of His own brothers, He is showing that this new relationship with God in Christ Jesus is even more important than the family ties, especially if family is made up of unbelievers. As Jesus said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37)

Jesus here points out the importance of a new family, the family of faith. God, in Christ Jesus on the cross, brings Mary and John together for their mutual edification. From the cross, Jesus shows us the relationship of believers to one another, as one family. We are all to be mothers, sons, brothers, sisters, daughters, to one another – all with God as our Father.

On the cross Christ takes on a new relationship with those whom He has walked and talked. It is on the cross that He fulfills His purpose for coming into the world, to be the Savior of the world. No more is He Mary’s Son, but now, Mary’s God and Lord, her eternal Savior.

In the same way, He is now more than friend, rabbi, and master to John, but is now showing the disciple whom Jesus loved, just what true love is, that a man would lay down His life for His friends. He is now John's Lord and Savior.

Christ is now building His church in the relationship of God to believers and believers to one another. Where do these new relationships begin? At the cross! It is at the cross and by the blood which Christ sheds, that the church is built. From the riven side of Christ flows the water of baptism which brings us together into Christ's body, the church. From the cross Christ adopts us into Himself through the water of baptism, and it is in the body of Christ, His church, that Christ gathers us all together as one family.

Mary and John are given to one another for mutual support and comfort. Christ's church is gathered together as one family for mutual support and comfort. It is as the family is gathered together by Christ crucified, in Word and Sacrament, that we are brought together in order to comfort one another.

This giving of Christ, Mary to John, and John to Mary, has been seen by the church for countless generations to have a wonderful meaning for us as Christians. Christ is caring for His people here on earth.

Mary, is the church that gives birth to us and who cares for us, and John is the pastor who is to care for Mary, Christ's church. Pastor and church are to care for one another, they are to be of mutual benefit to one another, brought together and commanded by Christ to be together.

Dearly beloved of God in Christ Jesus, what a wonderful word we have from Christ today. We see the love He has for those whom His mercy calls to His heart.

You have been called by God, set apart and brought together through Christ into this family called His church. You and I are to care for one another and love each other with the love which has been given to us by Christ on the cross – one family in Christ. Amen.