

Seven Words: Word of Compassion *John 19:25-27*

Introduction

Often lost in the tragedy of the crucifixion story is the image of a broken-hearted woman at the foot of the cross. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was as close to the cross as the Roman soldiers would allow. Tonight's text makes that point quite simply:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

She was there with three other women:

- Her sister (whose name we don't know). This sister is identified in other gospels as the mother of James and John. That means, of course, that Jesus and two of his closest disciples were cousins.
- Mary, the wife of Clopas. Scholars think she was the mother of James the son Alpheus, another one of Jesus' disciples
- And Mary Magdalene, a person we read about frequently in the Biblical text. This Mary will play a key role in the events on Easter Sunday morning.

Absent from this cluster of is Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. We are pretty sure that Joseph had long since died. The last time he was mentioned is when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem when He was 12 years old.

- As you recall, his parents returned to Jerusalem to look for Him, only to find Him discussing doctrinal matters with the teachers of the Law.
- Once that story was told, Joseph passes from the scene.
- Mary, however, is mentioned frequently.

If I would have begun reading two verses earlier in John 19, you would have heard me say:

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. (John 19:23)

Legend says that Mary had given Jesus this undergarment when He had left home. It was fairly common for a mom to do that in those days. As you can imagine, something seamless took a lot of time to create and was the represented a lot of love a mother and her son.

Pastor Charles Swindoll thinks there is a connection between what the soldiers were doing and the words of Jesus in tonight's text. Swindoll writes:

Why now? (Mary) has been there all along, watching and weeping. Why hasn't He acknowledged or spoken to her? Could it be because of the seamless tunic? I think so. His outer garments were insignificant ... But when (the soldiers) touch

the tunic, they touched something very dear to his heart – the garment made for him by his mother.”

For a moment, let's put ourselves into the shoes of Mary. The announcement that she had been chosen to bear the Son of God had no doubt left her with a combination of excitement and apprehension. She was both honored and humbled. But shortly after Jesus was born, she began to realize what all was to come.

- **Simeon**

When Jesus was eight days old His parents took Him to the local synagogue to dedicate Him to the Lord. That's what the Law required them to do, and they did it faithfully.

While there, they met a man named Simeon who took the baby in his arms and offered praise to God that he had lived long enough to see the promised Messiah. And then he turned to Mary, and told her:

This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too. (Luke 2:34-35)

- **King Herod**

Sometime within the next two years, Mary was surprised by a visit from the Wise Men. How amazing that must have been!

But shortly thereafter Joseph was warned in a dream that King Herod was plotting to kill Jesus. Imagine that! Someone wanting to kill your two year old son! The Holy Family uprooted themselves and fled to Egypt for safety.

- **The insults of people**

There is little doubt that Mary also heard the many whispers of friends and relatives about the circumstances of her little boy's birth. "Illegitimate" would have been among the nicer things they said. People, as you know, can be cruel sometimes.

- **Rejection by the Jews**

Mary knew full well that Jesus was the one the Jews had been praying for. She knew He was the Messiah, but she watched in fear as they plotted against Him, and even in one instance tried to push Him over a cliff.

- **The Cross**

And now here she stood "near the cross." One writer said this:

The sword that would soon pierce her son's side had already sliced through her heart.

She had planted kisses on the brow of that little child, a brow that was now crowned with thorns. She had held those little hands as He learned to walk,

hands now pierced with nails. She had held Him and comforted Him when He scraped His knees, and now watched helplessly as He writhed in pain.

It is always dangerous to be associated with someone who the authorities believe is a criminal worthy of the death penalty, But she stayed there, unafraid. She couldn't do anything to help Him. All she could do was continue to love Him. And she did.

As Jesus looked down from the cross in that moment He was very aware of his mother's deep agony ... not just in that moment, but throughout her lifetime. And as the dutiful, loving son that He was, He spoke to her with a love that far surpassed her love for Him:

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

I see three lessons here that I want to apply to my own life, and I hope you feel the same way:

LESSON #1: AWARENESS OF THE NEEDS OF THOSE AROUND ME

It would probably be understandable if Jesus had overlooked the pain His mother was feeling in that moment. I think we would all understand that. But despite what He was experiencing, Jesus still cared for His mother's needs in that awful moment.

We sometimes are startled by the way Jesus addresses His mother: "Woman" He calls her. I would never have dared to refer to my own mom in that way! And especially not if Dad was around. But don't hear it in that way. The Greek word is a term of endearment. It is one of the sweetest ways you can address your mother. There is tenderness in this moment that is easy to overlook.

Jesus committed the care of His mother to His cousin John. It's interesting, isn't it, that the four brothers of Jesus weren't given that task. There are a couple of reasons for this:

- The brothers lived in Galilee, and Mary was in Jerusalem.
- More importantly, we know that the brothers of Jesus did not become followers of Jesus until after the resurrection. They would be among the believers when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, but at this point in time they could not bring themselves to believe that their brother was the Messiah.

For even his own brothers did not believe in him. (John 7:5)

I am reminded that no matter how much I am hurting, there are others around me who are hurting too. None of us suffers alone.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)

LESSON #2: AWARENESS OF THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

When Jesus was arrested, we read:

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. (Matthew 26:56)

But sometime as the day wore on, John returned and placed himself alongside the four women who had gathered there by the cross.

Jesus does not scold John for having left, but instead gives him the responsibility of caring for Mary. John was like a brother to Jesus throughout their time together. Scriptures refer to John as the disciple that Jesus loved. John willingly accepts that responsibility.

If you look ahead to the events that unfold over the next few days, this new living arrangement is important in another way.

- On Easter morning, after having been alerted to the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene, John was one of the two disciples who sprinted to the tomb to see for themselves. When he entered the tomb, the Scriptures tell us:

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (John 20:8)

- The Scriptures go on to say:

Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. (John 20:10)

That means that after John left the tomb, he went home ... to where Mary was now staying. She would have learned from John that her son had risen from the dead.

This reminds me that we as the community of faith have a responsibility to care for the needs of other members of the community of faith. That would become a distinctive of those early Christians:

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

LESSON #3: I WANT TO ALWAYS BE FOUND "NEAR THE CROSS"

I don't know what prompted John to come back after he ran away. He is the only one of the disciples who did. The others would meet together after the resurrections – secretly, of course, because they were afraid of the Jews. But only John was there. Mary and the other three women were there, and had been there all along.

What made him come back? I don't have a great answer for that, but here's what I think. The more time you spend with Jesus, the more you know that you the place you want to be is always at the foot of the cross.

The hymn writer puts it like this:

Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain—
Free to all, a healing stream—
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

Refrain:
In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Help me walk from day to day,
With its shadows o'er me.

I agree.

APPLICATION

As the earliest Christians began to live out their faith, wild rumors had begun to circulate about what Christians actually taught and did in their meetings together. They didn't live like everyone else in society.

To defend the good name of Christians everywhere, a church leader in Carthage named Tertullian wrote a brief explanation of Christian practices and a critique of the unjust accusations that had been made against them. Here is part of what Tertullian had to say:

"It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See how they love one another, they say, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, they say, for they themselves will sooner put each other to death (The Apology, ch. 39)."

From the cross Jesus modeled that compassion. May it also be the hallmark of who we are.

Amen.