

Draw Near: The Women

Luke 23:27-31, 55-56

INTRODUCTION

In these Thursday evening services, we have been focusing on the people you would meet as you would DRAW NEAR to the cross of Christ. So far, all of these individuals have been men: Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, John the Beloved, the soldiers and, last week, the two thieves. Tonight the ladies take center stage. This passage in Luke leaves them unidentified.

- Matthew reports they were: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.
- Mark identifies those present as: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.
 - But he quickly adds: "Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there." (Mark 15:41)
- The Gospel of John says that those near the cross of Jesus were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

But again, the key phrase for me is the additional sentence in Mark 15:41:

"Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there."
(Mark 15:41)

It was not just three or four women who gathered with Mary the mother of Jesus. It was many. The Gospels seem to indicate that over time this group of women grew until it came to be "many" here at the cross.

- Who were they? I suspect they were the women whose stories fill the pages of the gospels. Like:
 - The woman at the well – who felt the compassion of Jesus even though her lifestyle had branded her as unwelcome in her own community
 - The widow of Nain, whose son – her sole remaining source of support – was brought back to life
 - The woman caught in adultery and about to be stoned until Jesus intervened
 - The woman with the bleeding disorder, healed by a touch of Jesus' robe
 - And many more like them.

These were women ...

#1: WOMEN ... WITH A SIMPLE FAITH

Not simple, as in elementary school. But simple as in "uncomplicated." Such a faith was exemplified by Jesus' own mother at the wedding in Cana. She knew her son could work a miracle once the caterers ran out of wine. So she went to them, pointed out Jesus, and simply said:

Do whatever He tells you to do. (John 2:5)

#2: WOMEN ... WITH AN EVANGELISTIC HEART

Like the woman at the well. The result of her encounter with Jesus was:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of (her) testimony. (John 4:39)

What was her testimony? Simply this:

He told me everything I ever did. (John 4:39)

She, and the other women in the gospels, shared their personal experiences, and God used those to bring about faith in the people who listened. No polished presentations. Just personal experience

#3: WOMEN ... WHO EXPERIENCED FORGIVENESS

Like that woman who had been caught in adultery. She was guilty. Clearly guilty. Those who brought her to Jesus made it clear that she had been caught in the act.

Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. (John 8:4)

She never even offered a defense. She didn't even rat out the man who was involved. It takes two to tango, my Mom once told me.

But when the accusers all left because none was able to cast the first stone, Jesus relayed to her the word of forgiveness.

Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:10-11)

#4: WOMEN ... WHO WERE FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

Like Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Because of what Jesus had done to her brother – raising him from the dead – she poured out the expensive perfume on his feet. She was overwhelmed with her gratitude.

- Don't you imagine the woman who had been bleeding for 38 years felt that way too?

#5: WOMEN ... WHO WERE FIRMLY COMMITTED TO THEIR FAITH

Through thick and thin, these women followed Jesus. Where were their husbands? We know some of them did.

- Zebedee's wife and the wife of Clopas were among the group, just to name two. There is no evidence their husbands were there.

I for one have always been grateful for the firm commitment of the women who are responsible for my faith. Many had husbands who walked along with them: My Mom, My Grandma Chivington, My Great Aunt Myrna, Jenelle Brown. There are more, of course.

- But I am especially grateful for women like Merle Craft (my first Sunday School teacher) and Helen Smith (the lady who lived across the street from the school and ran a weekly Bible class in her living room).
- Neither of their husbands ever darkened the door of the church. But they remained faithful.
- It was not until I advanced to the adult Sunday School class that I had a male teacher. My youth group was led by a team of three husbands and wives, but even then the wives did most of the teaching.

#6: WOMEN ... WHO SERVED WHEREVER THEY COULD

Our text describes how some of these women followed Joseph and Nicodemus so they could see where Jesus was buried. It wasn't that they were curious. No, the body of Jesus would need to be cared for, so these women ... once they knew the location of the tomb ...

Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. (Luke 23:56)

Some scholars think these women cooked for the band of disciples, provided the necessary supplies they needed, and handled every other detail of the three year ministry of Jesus. Somebody had to do it. The disciples refused to wash each other's feet. It wasn't going to be them.

#7: WOMEN ... WHO WERE INCREDIBLY BRAVE

All of the men were in hiding "for fear of the Jews." Where were the women? At the foot of the cross.

These women – and other women in the Scriptures – have been largely been ignored or reduced to models of simple piety. But they risked their lives. Roman made no distinction. Women could be executed just the same as men.

It was the women who went to the grave on Easter morning, knowing full well they would have to convince the soldiers to roll back the stone so they could attend to the body of Jesus. The disciples were still hiding.

In this day and age, let's pray that men and women alike have the courage to be identified with Christ!

APPLICATION

Of all the people we have studied on these Thursday evenings, only the women have been consistent in their walks of faith. From the very beginning to the very end.

These women witnessed the highs...

- The feeding of the 5,000
- The sick who were healed
- The demons being cast out
- The incredible teaching

And the lows ...

- Including this lowest of lows at the cross.

They were there when He died. They witnessed His final moment.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28)

But the cross is never the end of the story. It was the women who made the discovery that He had risen! And it is only fitting that it should have been them.

Amen.