

WOMAN, HERE IS YOUR SON

John 19:25-27
Rev. Leo Douma 2 March 2008

I think one of the hardest things in life would have to be to watch some one you love suffering. That is particularly so if it is your child. If you have had to watch a seriously sick child in hospital, as I did 20 years ago, then you know the feeling. It often seems easier if you were suffering, rather than having to watch your child suffer. If we know that feeling, or could imagine it, then we have a sense of affinity with Mary, Jesus' mother. We know in some sense how she felt at that moment in our text. Think of her as she had to watch her son, suffering and dying on the cross. You can imagine the anguish that is suggested by the opening line of our text: (:25) *"Near the cross of Jesus stood Mary his mother..."*

In this period of Lent we are becoming aware again of the ugliness of the crucifixion scene. We are reminded of what Jesus went through for our sin. We are reminded of the suffering, the torture of dying on the cross; the shame felt by the crowd; the mocking of the Pharisees; the abuse of the soldiers. It is a terrible scene. And there *"...near the cross of Jesus stood his mother..."* We can sense Mary's hurt, her pain, her grief.

The prophecy of Simeon 33 years earlier when Mary & Joseph presented baby Jesus at the temple comes to mind. He had said in Luke 2:35, how the child would *"cause the rising and falling of many..."* And then he had spoken about Mary as well: *"...a sword will pierce your own soul too"*. We can imagine that her natural inclination would be to want to take Jesus off the cross; to rid him of his suffering, to rid him of his shame; to comfort her son. That

surely would have been the natural response of Mary as mother, as well as those three other women with her.

But, bless her mother's heart that must not be allowed to happen! It is not just her son that is dying on the cross. There is far more to this situation. It is the Son of God, the Christ who hangs there on the cross. And he had come for the very purpose of dying on the cross. That was the whole point of the incarnation. Jesus was born to die. It was God's way of bringing redemption, His way of bringing forgiveness and hope.

Therefore, to do the will of his Father, Jesus wants to be on the cross. He must be on the cross. For the sake of the whole universe it is essential that he is on the cross. And this becomes clear with the words that Jesus speaks here in his third saying on the cross: *"Jesus said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son' and to the disciple 'Here is your mother'."*

The context suggests why Jesus notices his mother at this time. We see in the verses 23-24 that the soldiers *"...took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining..."* This was a common action by the soldiers who set up the criminals for crucifixion. One of the 'perks' of the job was that you got to keep the clothes of the victim. As Jesus, like any Jew of the time usually had five articles of clothing; namely, his shoes, a turban, a girdle, a tunic and an outer robe, each of the four soldiers got a piece of clothing, which left the tunic, the undergarment. They didn't want to tear it up so they cast lots for it. (And by the way, it is no coincidence that Psalm 22:18 predicted this. Jesus' crucifixion was part of God's plan.) Now, according to tradition, Jesus' mother Mary gave the undergarment to Jesus. It was something mothers normally gave their sons when they left home. If this is true, then

there seems to be a connection between what the soldiers were doing and this third saying of Jesus on the cross. Right after we are told they cast lots for his tunic Jesus speaks to his mother.

Why now? She's been there all along, watching, hurting; crying. The rest of his clothes didn't matter, but when the soldiers argued over the tunic, they touched something very dear to Jesus' heart. This was the tunic made for him by his mum. Feeling deeply for his mother who is standing near the cross seeing all this he is moved to speak to her.

At first these words seem to indicate simply the care of Jesus for his mother. Jesus is about to die and in his love for his mother, he makes provision for her. With Joseph, his step father, dead some years ago Mary as a widow could have found it very difficult. So Jesus in the midst of his own incredible suffering, carrying the guilt and shame of the world, still thinks of his mother. It is so beautiful to see and it encourages us as children to follow his example and care for our parents. It is a challenge to young people to think of their parents' needs rather than focusing on their own needs.

But a careful look at the text shows that there is more to it than just the care of a dying son for his mother. In fact (and notice this) there is an emphasis away from the mother-son relationship. Think about it. The question comes to mind. If Jesus were just concerned with Mary's physical well being and a roof over her head, why was that not dealt with before? Jesus crucifixion was not some terrible turn of events that caught him out; a victim of circumstances. Jesus had planned it. Like we said even the casting of lots for the tunic was previously prophesied. The Bible clearly says that Jesus knew "...his time had come." That's why he had gotten on to that donkey on that Palm Sunday to stir up the crowd and the Pharisees. So if

the cross was part of Jesus' plans, why had he not sorted out the care of his mother before hand? And even so Jesus could have made provision after his resurrection. Jesus knew that his death would not be the end. So in reality Jesus had plenty of time to settle things for his mother. But then again, why should Jesus have been concerned at all? Don't forget he had other family. Mary and Joseph had other children who could provide for Mary, including several brothers. And then there was the extended family. Some were there with Mary at the cross: (:25) "*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister and Mary the wife of Clopas...*". From other biblical references we can say that Mary's sister was Salome, the mother of James and John. And Clopas was the brother of Joseph. So at the cross were an aunt on his mother's side, and an aunt from Jesus' step father Joseph's side. And something else here, "*...the disciple whom Jesus loved...*" as he is described in our text (:26) is John, the son of Salome; in others words, Jesus' cousin. So there is plenty of family around to help Mary.

Now you notice that Jesus does not say "Mother I have arranged for the brothers & the family to take care of things." He says "*Dear woman...*" and here the English version is gentler than the Greek which simply says "*Woman*"; "*Woman here is your son.*" So what is the significance of Jesus addressing his mother as "*Woman*", and why does he suggest that his cousin John act as her "*son*" when Mary already has several sons of her own? Well, the point is that Jesus is, in a way, distancing himself from his mother. He is placing an emphasis on a spiritual relationship instead of the maternal one. The significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus is doing on the cross had to be seen. This is not just a family affair; a son dying; an event played out too often in history.

No, what we have here at the cross is the act of mercy of God for the restoration of the entire creation! This is an event of cosmically staggering proportions! Mary must not just see her son suffering, wishing him off the cross; grieving her loss. She must see her Lord and Redeemer, her God. She must be in awe and adoring him as he is about to take on hell itself and defeat death and sin and Satan.

Jesus is about to usher in the kingdom of God. And in that kingdom what is of significance is not just the physical family relationship. Rather it is the spiritual relationship, those who are brothers and sisters by faith. Whoever believes, whoever does the will of the Father, is Christ's brothers and sisters and mother. So said Jesus in Matthew 12(:50). After his resurrection Jesus' relationships with his family were all changed. Remember what he said to Mary Magdalene, who was also there at the cross? When she recognized him in the garden after his resurrection he said "*Do not hold onto me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.*" In other words, 'Don't think its all back to the way it was. Don't try to hold me here.'" Jesus was going to the Father to rule as the Lord of lords! No longer could he be seen just as Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, but Master of the universe, Lord of the church.

So we see in our text that Jesus, in that sense, is pulling away to get closer to those he loves. He is pulling away from his mother and family so he can be their Saviour. Through the forgiveness he gains on the cross, Jesus will live in them by his Spirit. As Jesus said in John 14; "*I will not leave you as orphans. The Father will give you another counsellor to be with you forever.*" The family bond will be replaced and greatly deepened by the mystical union between Christ and the believer which comes by the Spirit. After Pentecost the family, as believers, will live the very life of Christ. All his glory as Lord and Saviour will also be theirs as the children of God. Much

of Mary's significance to this point in history had been in the fact she was Jesus' mother. But in the kingdom her significance would be in the fact that she is a believer, by faith a sister of her Lord, together with all the rest of the family of believers. We notice in the book of Acts, after the Ascension that the believers are gathered in the upstairs room. Those mentioned first are the disciples, the Apostles of the church. Those mentioned last are Jesus' physical family: "...*Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*" Their significance in this group is not that they are family, but that they are believers.

Now, this reference to Acts also gives us an understanding as to why John is asked to be a 'son' to Mary. John is the "...*disciple Jesus loved.*" There was a very close bond between them. But of more significance is that John was to be one of the Apostles. He was one who would be an office bearer in the church of Christ. So Jesus was entrusting the care of his mother to John as part of his new family, his body, the church. You notice that John was told by Jesus, not just to take care of his mother, but to be her "son". In other words John was to act as Jesus' substitute. He was to be Jesus to Mary. Jesus was pulling away because he had to suffer and die. Jesus did so as our substitute. We should have been the ones to suffer hell. We are the sinners. But Jesus died in our place. He was our substitute. His time on earth was finishing. His relationships were changing. But his family would not be missing out. His love for them would still be expressed to them. Jesus may go to the Father. But John will be there to act as "son" to Mary. He will love her and care for her (spiritually) as Jesus would. John, as Christ's representative, as an Apostle of Jesus, would be Jesus to Mary. In other words, he was asked to be the substitute's substitute! John was to be Jesus' voice to express his care, his hands to provide Christ's provisions: "*Woman, here is your son.*"

When we look at this we can see the tremendous compassion our Lord Jesus has. In the midst of his own suffering while the world mocks and hell is about to open its ugly mouth and swallow the Christ- "...*Jesus saw his mother there...*" And he provided for her in the way she needed most. So we too can be encouraged! If Jesus could be so caring in his darkest hour, he can be so to us even more now as the Lord of all. And Jesus has provided for us what he provided for his mother at the cross. As he called John to stand in his place for Mary, so he has called the church to represent him in our midst. Some one once wrote: "Christ has no hands but our hands to do his work today; he has no feet but our feet to lead men in his way; he has no tongue but our tongues to tell others how he died and rose again; he has no help but our help to bring others to Jesus' side." Yes, we are Jesus' 'Johns'. We are the substitute's substitutes. We are to represent Jesus to each other. We are together the family of God.

I remember once in my first church, when I really felt the pressure. Liz was in hospital. A woman had just died of motor neuron disease and I had a funeral to prepare. But I also had a wedding on the Saturday and two services on the Sunday. I was so busy that I had little time to prepare lunch and eat it. Just then, as my sugars were dropping, into my study walked a friend from the church. He was holding something behind his back as he said "I heard things are a bit tough for you. I wanted to do something to help, but I didn't know what, so, here, I bought you a hamburger". I hugged the guy and said "Steve, you are an angel from heaven, it's exactly what I need right now. Thank you!" Steve in that moment was Christ to me, providing what I needed; reassuring me he, Jesus, would help me through the week. Our church is having another rapid influx of new migrants. This is not just about more people in a building. It's

about the spiritual family of Jesus growing here. When as new migrants we are so far away from family, friends, the old networks, the church is so important as we are a family to each other. Not just in the physical sense of friends around a BBQ. But in the sense of being Jesus to each other, representing the voice and hands of Jesus, saying in Jesus' name, as his substitute: the Lord is here with you; he deeply cares for you. Think of how Jesus cared for Mary, his mum, in the midst of his own terrible suffering. They say, stress and suffering reveals your true character. Well, here we see Jesus' character. His grace amazes and astounds us. If Jesus could be so caring as he approached hell as our substitute, consider what he will do as the Lord of the Universe. We just need to be Jesus to each other and remind each other of that truth.