

Final Words (part 3)
“Behold Your Son...Behold Your Mother”
John 19:25-27
Pastor Ray Baker

This is our third week in our series: The Final Words. Today we are focusing on Jesus words from the cross: “Behold your son...Behold you mother.” Imagine for a moment that you are listening to Mary the wife of Clopas recall the horrible day Jesus was crucified.

I am Mary, wife of Clopas. I begged Mary, Jesus’ mother, not to follow as he was led away to be crucified. “Mary, it will be too hard. You don’t want to see this.” But she said to me, “I will not let my son die alone among these wolves.” And so we went, joined by only one of his disciples, the young John, and by Mary of Magdala.

Jesus’ mother was a strong and determined woman. And she loved her son. He was to her the joy of her life and the purpose of her existence. Jesus had sought to prepare her for what lay ahead in Jerusalem. Somehow she had always known he would die as a young man, giving his life to save the world.

Mary was determined to stand near Jesus as he suffered. She would fight to hold back the tears, seeking to show her son strength and love. She would do all she could, standing there, to ease his pain and to give him hope.

As the crowd hurled their insults, Mary slowly pushed her way through until she stood before him. They hung him naked, so as to humiliate him, and in wretched pain. Jesus’ feet were two feet off the ground, and from where Mary stood she could reach up and touch his chest, though the Roman guards forbade such things. As we stood there, Mary said to Jesus, “I love you, my son. Your Father will soon come for you. You are in his hands. I love you.”

It was then that Jesus looked at his mother and spoke slowly and tenderly to her, “Dear woman, this now is your son.” He nodded his head toward John. And then, to John he said, “Here is your mother.” John placed his arm around Mary and held her as if to say to Jesus, “I understand, I will take care of her.” (Adam Hamilton, Final Words; Chapter three)

I don't think any of us can imagine being in this situation. What would it be like for a mother to stand at the feet of her son while he is being executed by the authorities? What would it be like for a son to look into his mother's eyes as he felt his life slipping away?

Tradition teaches us Mary the wife of Clopas was Mary's sister-in-law, believed to be the wife of Joseph's brother. Both women would have known everything about the life of Jesus. That's why they followed him from his birth to the cross.

The Young Mary, Virgin Mary, was only a teenager when God came to her and asked her to give up her hopes and dreams. Instead, asking her to bear God's own son, to take a risk, and trust that Joseph would believe she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. This was a lot to ask of a teenage mother. She was young, inexperienced, and she was faithful to God's calling.

Mary carried the baby Jesus in her womb. She changed his diapers...fed and nurtured him...she and Joseph took him to Egypt to insure his safety...returned to Israel and gave him an education in the Synagogue...and she followed his ministry...all the way to the cross.

The young disciple John is sometimes referred to as the beloved disciple. Jesus loved him and trusted him. At the time of his death, Jesus turned to John and asked him to care for his mother as if she were his own. There must have been a bond between these men that was tested by time. Their bond brought them as close to one another as though they were brothers.

Jesus loved his mother. He knew she had stood by him as an infant, as a child, at the time of his earthly father's death, throughout his ministry, and even now...as

he hung on the cross. Jesus loved her so much that he wanted her to receive John as her son. Trusting that they would love and care for each other.

In these relationships we see an example of what the Church is called to emulate. We are called to be like a young man who is willing to adopt a woman in need...as if she was his own mother. We are to be like a woman who sees a young man who is all alone...and she is willing to adopt him as if he was her own son.

This is what God and Christ expect of the Church. It's what they expect of you and what they expect of me. They expect us to look on the needs of others as though they are our own family members who are in need of help. We are to offering them encouragement, support, and shelter.

The family is the core group of our lives. We learn about kindness, sharing, and generosity in our families. We learn about grace, forgiveness, and diversity in our families. Those of us who attend an extended family reunion meet people from all walks of life who have lived a plethora of experiences, both good and bad. People who have been successful (they will tell us stories about their success) and those who have not.

For example, at a reunion you will run into Uncle Dave who has spent a little time in jail; Aunt Susan who drinks a little too much; Uncle Bob who was divorced...three times; Cousin Tom who spent time in a rehab center. Of course they will also meet us, with all our foibles and flaws. They will experience our little white lies; our naivety and gullibility; the rumors we tell; the egos we pretend don't exist; and they may even experience our sin of pride.

Fortunately, we can always be assured of three things. There is not a person God doesn't love, a situation God can't help, or a sinner God will not save.

There is an old story you may have already heard.

Two brothers worked together on the family farm. One was married and had a large family. The other was single. At the day's end, the brothers shared

everything equally, produce and profit.

Then one day the single brother said to himself, "It's not right that we should share equally the produce and the profit. I'm alone, and my needs are simple." So each night he took a sack of grain from his bin and crept across the field between their houses, dumping it into his brother's bin.

Meanwhile, the married brother said to himself, "It's not right that we should share the produce and the profit equally. After all, I'm married, and I have my wife and children to look after me in years to come. My brother has no one, and no one to take care of his future." So each night he took a sack of grain and dumped it into his single brother's bin.

Both men were puzzled for years because their supply of grain never dwindled. Then one dark night the two brothers bumped into each other. Slowly it dawned on them what was happening. They dropped their sacks and embraced one another. -Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Calif.: Heath Communications, 1995), 37.

In Northern Spain there is a group of people called the Basque. One of their songs shares their view of the relationship between the universe and each person.

The Earth is the center of the universe
The house is the center of the Earth
The family is the center of the house
The person is the center of the family.

This week I read a story about a group of missionaries who translate the Bible into the language of the peoples in the communities where they are working. While working with a group in an African tribal community they were trying to decide which of their words best described God's love.

"The verbs for this particular African language consistently end with one of three vowels an i, a, or u. However in their language there were only two spellings for the word love: "dvi" and "dva." So the translators wondered why the word was not spelled with the letter "u."

The team of translators gathered with the most influential leaders in the community. They spent most of a day talking to them about the tribe's use of the word love. In an effort to truly understand the concept of "love" in this African language, the missionaries asked them these questions.

"Could you dvi your wife?"

"Yes," they answered, "that would mean that the wife had been loved, but the love was gone."

"Could you dva your wife?"

"Yes," they responded, "that kind of love depends on the wife's actions. She would be loved as long as she remained faithful and took good care of her husband."

"Could you dvu your wife?"

Everyone in the room laughed.

"Of course not!" they replied. "If you said that, you would have to keep loving your wife no matter what she did, even if she never got you water and never made you meals. Even if she committed adultery, you would have to just keep on loving her. No, we would never say dvu. It just doesn't exist."

The missionary sat quietly for a while, thinking about John 3:16, and then he asked, "Could God dvu people?"

There was complete silence for three or four minutes; then tears started to trickle down the weathered faces of the elderly men of the tribe. Finally they responded, "Do you know what this would mean? This would mean that God kept loving us over and over, while all that time we rejected His great love. He would be compelled to love us, even though we have sinned more than any people."

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." John 3:16-17 (NRSV)