

Lenten Series 2018: Words from the Cross
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John 19:25-27 "Your mother...Your son"
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²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Luke 1:26—38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mothers and sons have unique relationships. Certainly this was true of Mary and Jesus. We will get to the heart of this passage in a moment, but I thought I'd begin with a few light-hearted mother-son moments.

It's not hard to imagine overhearing these mom's talking to their famous sons:

Thomas Edison's mother: "Son, of course I'm proud that you invented the electric light bulb—now turn the light off and go to bed!"

Abraham Lincoln's mother: "Abe, what's with the stovepipe hat? Why can't you wear a baseball cap like the other boys?"

Albert Einstein's mother: "But it's your senior picture! Can't you do something with that hair?" (styling gel or mousse??)

Michelangelo's mother: "Can't you just paint on walls like other kids? Do you have any idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling??"

No doubt there were occasions when Mary was frustrated, puzzled, or delighted by Jesus' words and deeds, and we'll consider a few of those. I can imagine Mary saying to him, "Jesus, for heaven's sake...!!" There no doubt in my mind, Mary had a sense of humor. It is a mandatory parenting survival tool!

Jesus—fully divine—was also fully human—and born into a human family. His family of origin included is earthly father Joseph, and mother Mary. The scripture mentions Jesus' younger siblings on several occasions, but when it comes to his family of choice/disciples, we do not know for sure if or how many of his siblings, were disciples.

You'll recall that there were some unusual circumstances surrounding Jesus' conception and birth. Mary was a teenage mom, and most likely Joseph was considerably older than she. Both received angelic visits. After agreeing to participate in God's plan which the angel put forward, Mary became pregnant while engaged to Joseph, risking a broken engagement as well as ridicule and her reputation. But Joseph was onboard with the plan, and no doubt was a devoted father to Jesus.

As with most couples who are expecting for the first time, they are clueless as to how their lives will change and change forever! Even though children grow and matures (hopefully), and become independent, "once a parent, always a parent". One's concern for the well-being of our children does not stop because they turn 18/21 or when they marry or enter a certain stage of life. The nature of the relationship changes as the child matures into an adult, but parental love and concern for them, never ends.

Mary and Joseph had at least two experiences, recorded in scripture, that give us a few clues about the unique aspects of being the parents of Jesus.

When Jesus was still a newborn, his parents went to Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-38) in order to fulfill the requirements of the law and to offer a sacrifice accordingly. While they were there, they had an encounter with an old man named Simeon. This man was very devout, and God "revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah."

So on this particular day, the four of them meet in the temple. Simeon sees this baby and makes a beeline for this couple. He took the baby Jesus *"in his arms and praised God, saying:*

²⁹ *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[d] your servant in peace.*

³⁰ *For my eyes have seen your salvation,*

³¹ *which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*

³² *a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."*

Well! That was a grand pronouncement!

Jesus' parents "marveled at what was said about him.³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Put yourself in Mary's sandals. This is your first born son.

Who *is* this old man and what right does he have to say anything about your baby? The blessing? Sure, that's nice for a newborn.

But this grand pronouncement? Followed by this heart-breaking, soul-piercing one?

No thank you!

I can only imagine that Mary held her son even closer, and said to Joseph,

"Let's get out of here and go home!"

Too much to wrap one's head around all that this stranger had said!

Fast forward about twelve years to the next episode recorded also by Matthew (2:41-51).

Jesus' family were accustomed to making the annual trek to Jerusalem

for the Festival of the Passover.

⁴³After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" Jesus asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"⁵⁰ **But they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

Apparently Jesus, at approximately twelve years of age, was becoming aware of God's agenda for his life, aware that his Heavenly Father had plans for him (v.49).

His parents did not understand, but Matthew says Mary "pondered these things in her heart"(v.51). There is sub-text here. Luke is not filling in all the blanks, and we are left to wonder! What is clear is that Jesus is NOT an ordinary child.

Fast-forward again. Very early in his ministry Jesus and his disciples are at a wedding (John 2). Most likely it was relative's wedding as Mary is responsible in some fashion for the arrangements. During ancient times weddings could last for several days. Given the importance of hospitality in this culture, to run out of food or wine would be a major disaster.

John says it is on the third day, when she becomes aware that the wine is running quite low, she approaches Jesus and informs him. She simply tells him the tap is dry.

Jesus replied, " Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." (Sounds harsh to us, but this is a respectful way to address Mary.)

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:4-5)

Mary expresses faith in Jesus, confident that he can remedy the situation, which indeed, he does!

Fast forward again. Jesus has gone public with his ministry of teaching, preaching and healing. His popularity is increasing to the point that crowds often overflow the venue. When his family of origin shows up, they can't get in.

⁴⁷Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

⁴⁸He replied..., "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

(Matthew 12:46-50)

Can you imagine how this message was received by Mary and Jesus' brothers? Hmm...It must have been tough. He's not disowning them, not really. But he *is* implying that there is another loyalty that takes priority over familial loyalty (over DNA!). He is saying that loyalty to one's heavenly father, and obedience to God takes precedence over human family ties.

Back at the foot of the cross, Jesus' strength is waning. It is hard to breathe let alone talk. But Jesus has some unfinished family business. In this passage, two things are happening simultaneously:

First—in this ancient patriarchal culture, women needed to be under the protection of a male. A girl went from her father's household, into her husband's. In the event that she became widowed, she still needed to be under the care of her nearest male relative: father, eldest son, brother, or brother in law. (Remember the story of Ruth and Naomi in the OT.)

At this time, it is likely that Joseph was deceased. Jesus is the eldest son, so this responsibility for care for his mother fell to him. Knowing his life is ebbing away, and his male siblings are nowhere to be found, he entrusts the care of his mother, to his beloved disciple and friend, John. In Jesus' dying moments, he is thinking of others!

This is the obvious aspect of what is transpiring.

The more subtle aspect of this conversation is the creation of a new family! DNA is no longer the bond that binds individuals together, Jesus is forming a family in which *faith* is the bond that ties us together! In the relationship of his dear mother Mary, and his beloved disciple John, Jesus sees the embryonic beginnings of the church! In his dying moments, Jesus is thinking of you and me!

My family of origin is very small...my mom was an only child, so no aunts, uncles, cousins there. My dad was one of five siblings, but when my parents divorced, they divorced us too. Last week I told you about my only sibling, and she wanted me dead (if you weren't here, you'll have to ask someone who was!) That's my family of origin. I used to say that I could have a family reunion in a phone booth. A what? Phone booths have gone the way

of the dinosaurs! I'm really in bad shape when it comes to family. I've always wanted to be part of a big family. Didn't happen when I married either. So...

I've been thinking that I'd like Marian Kerr to adopt me! If you've been reading our Lenten devotional, you read a wonderful tribute that her daughter, Sheila, wrote about her mom. So I figure maybe Marian could adopt me and then I'd have another sister too. And the thing is, they have these BIG family reunions, that start at around 75 people and get bigger from there!

But, wait a minute! No need for that.

Friends, I don't know the details of your family situations, but I know that none of them are perfect. Jesus invites us into a family that is connected not by DNA but by faith and trust in him.

When Jesus was enduring the most excruciating death imaginable, he was not alone. He had the companionship of his beloved mother and disciple John, and several other women. Jesus was not alone. You need not be alone either.

Jesus, even at this critical moment as his life is slipping away—is thinking of others. He was thinking not only of the welfare of his mother, he was thinking of you and me as well. And thus, the church is set in motion as the human family of God by the Savior himself! Mary and John, Marian and Sheila, and you and I can belong to God's forever family of faith!

This is Good News!

So at the foot of the cross we hear Jesus' words:

"Father, forgive them" -- A word of forgiveness.

"Today...with me...Paradise." A word of hope.

"Woman, your son. John, your mother". A word of love and belonging.

Thanks be to God!