

Final Words, Three
Woman, here is your son...here is your mother

John 19:23-27; Psalm 22:18

1. Compassion.

- **Selfless**

2. Love.

- *Luke 2:49; Matthew 22:37-40, 10:37*

- **Priority**

3. Relate.

- *Mark 3:31-35; Galatians 3:28; John 3:5-6, 19:27*

- **Family**

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Michael O'Neill

Final Words: When Love Spoke From the Cross¹ "Woman, behold your son! ...Behold your mother!"

Last words are always important – we pay attention to them, and that should be especially true for Jesus' last words. *Every* word that Jesus spoke was on purpose and packed with meaning; he chose them carefully, so we can be sure that Jesus' last words from the cross were carefully chosen by Him for us to learn from. Not only do they reveal the horror of crucifixion that he endured, but His last words also carry deep truth that reveal His heart, His purpose, His power, his hope and his love for us. This series is about those last words of Jesus, and today is our third Sunday. The first Sunday we learned about Jesus' incredible capacity to forgive with his statement, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing." Last week we saw Jesus promise paradise to one of the criminals who asked for it, while the other rejected Jesus and died without Christ, in Hell. We looked at Jesus' statement to the one criminal on the cross: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." In fact, if you were with us last week, you know I tried to show you an excerpt from author and pastor Alistair Begg who was talking about that conversation between Jesus and the criminal. But right at the key moment of that video, the power went out and we lost it! So, just so you can see what you missed, let me show it to you now...

Isn't that powerful? So very true. Even though the power went out right at that moment, the Holy Spirit was at work and many of you indicated you were doing what that criminal did – you prayed to repent of sin and to turn to Jesus and accepted Jesus' invitation to forgive you and give you new life. You made it! I've been praying for you all week, and I hope you are experiencing a new or renewed relationship with Jesus himself. Today, we are going to see just how great is the love Jesus has for us and the depth of that love. We'll see it in his third statement from the cross. Would you please honor God's Word and stand with me as I read this passage of Scripture?

"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.

"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

¹ Sources:

Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005

Adam Hamilton, *Final Words from the Cross* Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2011

Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997)

George Lyons and T. Scott Daniels, *John 13–21: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. George Lyons, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2020)

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY: Edinburgh, 2001)

So this is what the soldiers did.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 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." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:23-27, niv)

Thank you for standing; please be seated.

By this time Jesus, at the young age of 33, has been crucified and hanging nailed to that cross for nearly three hours, when he looks down, sees his mother and says to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple standing next to her, "Here is your mother."

When Jesus was crucified, it was the Jewish Passover for which all Jews were expected to return to Jerusalem. The city was profoundly crowded with people. Jesus was a well-known teacher who performed miracles, so his crucifixion didn't escape attention. Most of the crowd gathered on that hill of crucifixion were Jesus' enemies. A few were curious or ambivalent, and as far as we know, besides the women there was only one disciple there. The others had betrayed and deserted Jesus when he was arrested.

Near the foot of his cross there was a group of four soldiers. They were the ones who forced Jesus to the hill. These were the ones who held Jesus down and hammered those huge metal spikes through the flesh, tendons and bones of Jesus' hands and feet and into the great wooden cross. These were the ones who hoisted the cross with Jesus on it, dropping it into a pre-dug hole with a thunderous jolt.

These soldiers were able to take for themselves whatever personal possessions belonged to the victims (I guess you could say it was one of the perks of the job). There wasn't much – typically clothes. That's what they were doing with Jesus' clothes.

Like most Jews of his day, Jesus wore five articles of clothing. He had sandals, he would have a head covering kind of like a scarf, he had an outer garment with a cloth belt around his waist that could be used to help cinch up the outer garment if he was in a hurry or running. Underneath all that was the inner tunic, or the undergarment. Jesus was hung naked on the cross – adding to his humiliation. The soldiers dividing up Jesus' clothes normally might just claim who gets what, but when it came to Jesus' inner tunic – the undergarment – that was different. They cast lots (basically threw dice) to see who would get it. They could have split it up among themselves by cutting it into four pieces, which would have essentially destroyed it, but they weren't about to do that. It was worth too much money.

You see, usually these tunics were made by taking two pieces of cloth cut the same and then sewed together. But Jesus' was seamless – meaning it was woven together as one piece. Making it this way was a much longer and painstaking process, making it much more valuable. But it's not the monetary value that's important to us; here's what is:

First of all, tradition tells us that Mary herself made this for Jesus. Good Jewish mothers would make this article of clothing for their adult sons right before they went out from home and into the world. It was a way for the son to always remember his mother's care – a bit like a wearable hug. That means that Mary lovingly took a great deal of time and care

to make this for Jesus. Imagine how gut-wrenching it must have been for Mary to see these soldiers gambling over this intimate piece of clothing that she had poured her heart into for her son.

But there's something else. Remember Jesus' tunic is seamless. That's also the precise, exact description of the tunic that the high priest of the Jewish Temple would wear (*Exodus 28:32, 39:23*). John, the author of this Gospel account, was a master of deeper meanings. His Gospel can be read at face value, but he takes great care to also point out the deeper spiritual truths that God has embedded in Jesus' life story. Scripture tells us no less than five different places in the book of Hebrews that Jesus alone is *the* High Priest (*Hebrews 2:17, 4:14-16, 5:5-10, 7:23-28, 9:11-12*) to replace all high priests. By calling our attention to this article of clothing, John is helping us see that in Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus is both the High Priest and the sacrifice, the bridge between God and us (*1 Timothy 2:5, 2 Corinthians 5:19*).

There is one more really big thing about this part of the story. This, too, is fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. King David wrote Psalm 22 over a thousand years before Jesus was crucified, but it gives us an amazingly accurate description. In verse 18 it says:

“They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” (Psalm 22:18, niv)

This is remarkable! The odds of this coming true are one in one hundred quadrillion. That's one in 10 followed by 17 zeros. Fulfilling just 48 prophecies would be one in 10 followed by 157 zeros. And Jesus fulfilled over *three hundred* prophecies! Let there be no doubt: this *is* the Messiah.

Then the story takes us to another group of four, and that is the four women nearby. You've got to understand what an incredibly courageous thing it was for them to be there. It was very dangerous to be closely connected to a man whom the Roman Government considered so dangerous that he should be put to death that way. Even worse that the *Jewish* authorities wanted him killed. Not to mention that the entire crowd was stirred up into a demonic rage of violent fury. Think about it – if it wasn't dangerous to be associated with Jesus, why did his disciples run away when he was arrested – some we're told even fled leaving the clothes from their back (*Mark 14:51-52*)! These courageous women were there because they loved Jesus more than they were afraid of what might happen to them.

One of the women was Mary, Jesus' mother. In some ways she understood what was happening, but in most ways, she was overcome with dread for her son. She loved him, so where else would a mother be but by her son as he faced death.

Next was Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister². Her name was Mary Salome – we know that from other places in the Gospel accounts (*Matthew 20:20-23*). She had two sons, James and John (John was Jesus' closest friend, the author of the Gospel of John, and the one who was also there at the cross). Salome was the one in the story who wanted her sons to be first in Jesus' kingdom, so she asked Jesus to let her sons sit at his right and left hands – places of honor. Jesus warned her what she was asking for, because the way to his throne was through the cross. But she was undeterred. Of course it was a selfish, greedy thing to ask for, and Jesus lovingly but sharply rebuked her for it at the time. And yet here she was at the cross risking her life to be near him. Clearly she was able to take correction.

² Scholars debate this relationship, however most scholars and tradition indicate that they were related in this way.

Then there was another Mary (a popular name at the time). She was the wife of Clopas. She was another aunt of Jesus, but on his step-father Joseph's side. She was Joseph's brother's wife. She was the mother of two other disciples of Jesus – James the younger and Joseph. Follow that?³

Then there was Mary Magdalene. She could never forget who Jesus was and what he had done for her. The Bible tells us that Jesus cast seven devils out of her (*Luke 8:2, Mark 16:9*) and set her free through forgiveness and healing.

There the four women stood near the cross. With them was John, called the disciple whom Jesus loved (*John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20*). Jesus saw them, and he saw his mother and John. All the other disciples had run away out of fear, but John did not. He could not. He had a very special friendship with Jesus. They were cousins and the closest of friends. Their love was mutual. John is why we have the record of these private moments at the cross.

Jesus, seeing these two that he loved so much – his mother and his best friend, was compelled to make his third of seven statements from the cross, saying, "Woman, here is your son," and to John, "Here is your mother." These words are very personal and might seem unusual to us. But they teach us some very important things about Jesus, about his relationship with us, and about ourselves.

In these words from the cross, first see Jesus' ...

1. Compassion.

Here was Jesus. The brutality of the cross was unbearable, due to the pain of the gaping wounds where he had been scourged, the nails driven into his hands and ankles, not to mention the weight of the sins of the world.

You and I have never and will never experience anything like the suffering that Jesus went through. We *do* suffer, to some extent. And there is something I notice when *we* suffer. When I feel pain, it is hard to look beyond my pain. Pain often causes us to focus on our pain, making things about ourselves. And it is hard to care for others when my own world feels like it is falling apart. I try to help others when things are going good for me, but when my pain and suffering is really bad, others often take a back seat. We have a tendency to get self-absorbed when we suffer, don't we?

But Jesus, even though his pain is overwhelming, even though his own needs are overwhelming, he looks beyond himself and sees the pain and needs of others. He sees a mother who is about to lose her oldest son, and he wants to make sure that she is protected, taken care of, and looked after.

This was the responsibility of the oldest son, and in his absence, it would go to the younger brothers, but they were nowhere to be found. According to the Bible, Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Jesus as the Christ – at least not yet. The Bible tells us that they thought Jesus was crazy (*Mark 3:21*). They did not believe until after Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus

³ See footnote #2

wanted his mother in the care of someone who understood who he was and what his kingdom was. The one who was there was Jesus' cousin and closest friend. The Bible tells us that from this point on John took in Jesus' mother. The translation says literally, "into his home," which means he took her in "as his own."

In doing this, Jesus shows us not just any compassion, but...

– **selfless** compassion.

Even in his worst pain, his worst crisis, the one time that Jesus could have justifiably thought only about himself, Jesus showed selfless compassion for others.

Next, see Jesus' ...

2. Love.

Did you notice what Jesus called his mother? He didn't say, "Mother," or "mom," he said "woman." That seems a bit cold. Raise your hand if you are a mom...imagine if your child came up to you and greeted you by saying, "woman..." It doesn't sound like a loving thing to say, does it? So let me explain what is going on.

First of all, by calling her that, Jesus is protecting his mother. He knew that his enemies were prowling around under his feet like drooling, rabid wolves. All they needed was to have their attention drawn to Jesus' mother – the person who was so precious to Jesus – and they would tear into her too – if for no other reason than to hurt Jesus even more.

But there is more to it than that. Jesus is actually showing her proper respect. Children always ought to think the world of their parents. You want your kids to think you're the best. Like the little boy in children's church. The group had been memorizing Scripture, and the little boy stood up to recite his part, but he forgot his lines. His mother was on the front row trying to prompt him. She silently mouthed out the words, but it didn't help – he was blank. Finally she leaned forward and whispered, "I am the light of the world." The boy beamed and shouted out, "My mother is the light of the world!" All kids should think that of their moms. Jesus is showing us his love and respect for his mother.

But in calling her "woman," Jesus is also showing us the right...

– **priority** of love.

By calling her this, he's reminding her of an event way back when he was twelve years old. Even at that age, Jesus knew what his priority was. The story is in Luke chapter two. I'm going to read the story to you, and then point out the connection. Luke writes:

"When (Jesus) was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem

to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When 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."

See what Jesus said next:

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:42-49, niv)

Okay, who is the "father" that Jesus is referring to? God. Clearly he's not talking about Joseph, because he was in the Temple and he's calling it "his father's house." Jesus knew the right priority of love – to love God *first*. By calling Mary "woman" he's reminding her who his Father is: God.

There is another story of when Jesus had begun his ministry in his early 30s, and the religious scholars tried to trap him by asking him which of all the commandments was the greatest. This is what Jesus said:

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40, niv)

The right priority of love is to love God first. By calling her "woman," he was reminding her of this.

If you are a Christian – that means you have accepted Christ's death for you on the cross and have given your life to him – then the motivation for everything you do is your love for God. You are called to serve the Lord and love others. Our obedience must be to God first and foremost. That means we love others *out of our love for God*.

Jesus himself taught:

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37, niv)

Loving God is the top priority and Jesus modeled this even on the cross. Notice that he doesn't say that we should *not* love our father and mother, but we should love Christ *first*. We must have our priority right. When we love God first, we will obey him. And what does he tell us? The Ten Commandments say:

"Honor your father and mother." (*Deuteronomy 5:16*)

So while we prioritize love for God first, God will then make sure we love our parents and all others. That's why, just like Jesus did from the cross, we must be careful not to forget those in our families and their needs. God first, then family and others. Jesus had the priority of love right.

How about you? Are you willing to do the Father's will first? To take up your cross? Parents, are you trusting your children to God? And for all of us: are you loving your family

like Jesus did, by loving God first?

Finally, in that seemingly simple third phrase from the cross, Jesus shows us how to...

3. Relate.

There is a third teaching that Jesus gives us in this statement from the cross. Earlier in Jesus' ministry, Mark 3 records that Jesus had just healed a person. Then it says this:

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35, niv)

In the third statement before he died, Jesus is telling *us* that our real relationships with him and with each other are not based on the family we are born into but the family we are born *again* into. By calling his mother "woman," Jesus wasn't just saying "be nice to your mother." He was making a statement about the *new community* that will come into being because of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Blood may be thicker than water, but because of Jesus' shed blood for us, Spirit is thickest.

Because we could have our sins forgiven and be children of God, the church was born; a new community, and we relate to each other as family.

There are many people today who say that they might consider being a Christian, but that they don't want to be part of a church. But you cannot separate the two. Others say their support group, their social group, or their political group is their "community." And tragically, they are often right. There sometimes is better community in those places than in church. I say that to our shame because churches are supposed to be a loving family where everyone is accepted while at the same time encouraged to grow in Christlikeness.

When we are the church, then people who had nothing in common before are suddenly "brother" and "sister." People who may have disliked each other before now *choose* to love each other in the church. In the Life Group that Shelly and I are part of, we call ourselves something. Anyone in our small group here today? What do we call ourselves? "The Family We Choose"! That's the Church we are born again into.

The Bible says that:

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, niv)

By rewriting the covenant in his own blood, Jesus has done something completely new. In giving his mother to John, He is causing a new relationship to come into existence that did not exist before. The disciple and the woman are not individual people here; they also represent the way that *family* ties are transcended in the church by the ties of the Spirit of Christ. That is why Jesus calls his mother "woman" in the Gospel of John. He is superseding the blood relationship in order to create a much wider, stronger family in His blood by the

power of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus said at the beginning of his ministry in John 3:

Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
(John 3:5-6, niv)

Many, many times the Bible calls the church "family." All who are part of this True Church, all who are children of God have a new relationship with one another, a new way of relating to each other. We are all spiritual relatives and, even more deeply, we are blood relatives – related through the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross.

When we say Church, it's not referring to a location or a building. It's the...

– **family** of God.

We are one family. We are called to look after one another, to care for one another. It means that those who are more mature in their faith in the church are to be as fathers and mothers – to be mentors for those who are younger, who are the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. (1 *Timothy* 5:1-2)

Jesus hangs on the cross and says to *us* – "*these* are your brothers and sisters, mothers." Take a good look around you. These are the people you are going to spend eternity with. I hope you like them. You might as well learn to love each other, accept each other, and care for each other here. Because that's what we'll be doing forever in eternity.

"Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." (John 19:27, niv)

Selfless compassion, priority love, and family relationships. All from that single, third statement from the cross. May we practice and live out the same.

Prayer

Benediction:

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.
(Ephesians 6:23-24, niv)