

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 2 midweek
March 3, 2021
John 19:26-27

The Compassionate Word

When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:26–27 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

The third word from the cross is a word of compassion. "Woman, behold, your son! . . . Behold, your mother!" The disciples had fled in fear. Only some women, including His mother, along with John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, remained near the cross, keeping vigil.

How horrible and heartbreaking! No mother expects to see her child die. It's just not right! Children are supposed to bury their mothers, not mothers their children. And did Mary realize at the time what Simeon's words meant when he told her that a sword would pierce her own soul too? How it must have grieved the blessed mother of our Lord to see her Son dying on the cross! What mother could bear such a sight? Could she have imagined such things that glorious night in Bethlehem when shepherds came to visit and told of angels and heavenly "Glorias" as she had pondered everything they said in her heart? Could she have known the destiny of her Son as He changed water into wine at the wedding at Cana? Could she have understood why this was necessary to save the world, to save her?

John, His beloved disciple, is there too. Who can bear to watch his closest friend die such a horrible death? John, who had leaned on Jesus at table the night before, now stares up at the scene against the blackened sky. It was all so confusing. This was not the way it was supposed to go. Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!" and the waving of palms. He had entered the city like the King that He was. It was His moment; the crowds were with Him. And now it all comes down to this. Here Jesus is broken, beaten, bleeding, dying. John's heart, too, must have been broken as this Son of Thunder stands there utterly helpless to help his Lord.

From the cross, Jesus looks with compassion on His friend whom He loved and upon His mother, the gentle woman who had bore Him, nursed and nurtured Him, raised Him from boyhood in Nazareth. Since it's likely that Joseph since died, Jesus had cared for His mother as her firstborn son. Now, in a singular intimate moment, He entrusts His beloved mother to His beloved disciple, to John. "Woman," He says, addressing her with honor and respect, as He always did. "Woman, behold, your son. Behold, your mother." As Jesus is the surrogate Sinner, so now John is the surrogate son. Such compassion Jesus has that even in His dying breath, He

cares for the needs of His mother. From that time on, John took her into his home. Behold, thy mother.

The Lord Jesus places us into family, into community as well. He gives us to one another that we may be sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, for one another. One time, when Mary and Jesus' family wanted to take Him into protective custody, fearing that He had lost His mind, His disciples told Him, "Your mother and brothers are here for you." Jesus looked at the people gathered in a circle around Him and said, "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50).

Death is a thief who robs us of the company of those we love, separating mothers from sons, fathers from daughters, and husbands from wives. A result of our sin, we are separated by death from those we love. Sometimes sin has a wedging way, driving deep divisions into families, setting members against one another, estranging us from one another. Divorce is the tip of the iceberg that cuts through the bonds of blood. But Jesus calls us into community, into His family, the Church. We are children of God, born in Baptism, born of our holy virgin mother, the Church. Woman, behold, thy son, thy daughter. Child of God, behold, thy mother.

"The separation in His death is the death of our separation." The barrier of sin is torn down; the judgment of the Law lifted; the gates of our solitary confinement opened wide. The death of Jesus brings us together into Holy Communion and a holy community. Gathered in His Name, around His Word, Baptism, body and blood, we are bound together in His death and life.

It's said that blood is thicker than water. Family ties are strong. But baptismal water runs even thicker than blood, for it binds us together as one in the Body of Christ, a communion that goes on forever. The bonds of blood end with death. Husband and wife are united as "one flesh" until death parts them. But our unity in the body of Christ goes beyond death and the grave and on to resurrection and eternal life. Look around you and behold your brother, your sister, your family. He gives us to one another.

Years later, John reflected on this in his First Epistle:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. (4:7-12)

Let us pray:

May we all Your loved ones be,
All one holy family,

Loving, since Your love we see:
Hear us, holy Jesus. Amen. (LSB 447:9)

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener