

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WOMAN, HERE IS YOUR SON”

Scripture Lesson: John 19: 16b-27

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, March 23, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 19: 16b-27

The Crucifixion of Jesus

So they took Jesus; 17 and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

“They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Woman, Here is Your Son

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

I went to a party yesterday for a man named Ron. Ron, who is dying of cancer, decided—with the love and support, and maybe just a little prodding from some of his friends—to have a party to celebrate his life.

I have always admired those among us who, when faced with the reality of the future, see it within their power to show those around them how to die well. And in Ron's case, that meant taking time to celebrate his life with family and friends—and to do so on his own terms, while he is still with us!

It really is a rare treasure to be able to take life's downward bend and make of it a blessing to others. At the end of a person's life, it is a special gift—to oneself and to others—not to be preoccupied with things left

unsaid, or to be angry, or to plot revenge, but rather to be thoughtful and faithful and to opt for reconciliation, to opt for joy, and to strive for peace.

For these few Sundays during the Season of Lent, we have been focusing on some of the last words of Jesus. And this morning, we again come to what we might consider “deathbed words”—though Jesus was not on a bed.

Nails had been hammered through his hands and feet, fastening him vertically to a wooden cross. He had been spat upon, mocked, and whipped. They had put a sign above his head that read, “King of the Jews,” and with no lack of dishonor, they pressed a crown of thorns into his skull.

All the while, the tormenter—being affixation—had the long view in mind, making Jesus work for every painful breath until he breathed his last.

In our New Testament lesson this morning, we’ve come to the end. This is it. Jesus is about to die. So, what will he say?

What will prove to be the most important things for Jesus to communicate before he declares that it is finished, commends his spirit to God, and breathes his last?

Will he go over a final list of do’s and don’ts? Will he let the devil know that he’d better enjoy this moment, because three days from now Jesus will put a proverbial nail in his coffin?

Will he cry out, “This is an injustice!”? Will he command an army of angels to inflict revenge on those who had done him harm?

Jesus’ final words come with expected gravity—with weight—because they reveal what he wants to say, and perhaps what he must say, before his earthly body finally drinks to the dregs that cup which would not pass him by.

Listen again to verses 26–27: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother: ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home.”

In those few words, Jesus manages to do something remarkable: he continues to be about the business of redemption—of creating, of bringing forth, in this case, a family where there was no family before. A mother and a son, not bound by biology, but held together in grace.

Consider again the setting of this passage—Golgotha, the place of the skull. That is where Jesus had been crucified. And while he was there, soldiers had taken his clothes and divided them among themselves, casting lots to see who would get Jesus’ tunic.

Jesus had been stripped not only of his clothes, but also of his dignity. And hardly anyone was there.

Those disciples—the ones who had followed Jesus for so long—most of them were conspicuously absent at the foot of the cross. Remaining were just a few people. Even the Roman soldiers sent up there to do the dastardly deed were a skeleton crew.

But among those Jesus could see through his bloodshot eyes were his mother, and John, his beloved disciple.

Having followed Jesus so closely for years, they knew him well. They were not only heartbroken; they were scared. At that moment in time, Mary and John were merely a half step away from someone turning against them.

We sometimes forget that when Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed, it wasn't so much a lack of love that Peter had in his heart for Jesus, as it was fear. Peter was scared to death that he might be identified as a follower of Jesus—and that the fate of Jesus might well be his own.

It spoke volumes that the Beloved Disciple chose to be there at the foot of the cross. I imagine, as he saw Jesus dying, his whole world was dying. That's all John knew. What in the world would he do tomorrow? Perhaps he would pray that his father Zebedee had finished mending those old fishing nets—the task from which John had been called when Jesus first invited him to follow.

And what of Jesus' mother, Mary? This was the child she had borne that she was now watching die — this was the little boy with whom she snuggled and rocked to sleep. Ah, was this the sword that would pierce her heart too?

Yet from that place and time of deep suffering—for our Savior and for those who loved him—there came words of hope. Words that called two people together. Words that, I dare say, called us together.

The words, "Woman, here is your son," and "Here is your mother," are not just words that established the care of one person for another. They established a new community, a new family—based not on a family tree, but on the love of God.

Even today, we still don't do a very good job of thinking about one another in this way, or seeing each other the way God sees us.

We still tend to see others as strangers. We see the other side of the tracks. On our best days, we might see our neighbors, but seldom do we see them as family.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, we are introduced to the story of Moses, who was saved by God when his biological mother, Jochebed, put him in a papyrus basket and floated him down the Nile River.

She did that because the Egyptian pharaoh had decreed that certain Hebrew baby boys should be killed. Imagine—the only way you could save your child was to give them up. In this case, to place him in a basket and float him through the reeds in a crocodile-infested river.

But praise be to God, this wasn't the end of Moses' story. Pharaoh's own daughter saw the basket and had one of her attendants retrieve it.

Now, I don't know about you, but I've often wondered about that attendant. The basket could have been close to shore, but we don't know. All we know is that it was in the reeds—and so were the crocodiles. I've often playfully imagined that servant receiving the order, "Go and get the basket," and saying to Pharaoh's daughter, "Yes, I see it—O great daughter of Pharaoh—your wish is my command. But could we let the basket get a little bit closer?"

Here again, one of the Bible's unknown heroines did her job, and she retrieved Moses. Pharaoh's daughter became his mother.

Prior to that moment, nothing had existed except great animosity between the bloodline of Moses and the bloodline of Pharaoh. But now there existed a family—a bond of love that was shaped by God's grace.

The great Reformed theologian John Calvin once wrote that God's providence is not some distant force, but a "watchful, effective, and engaged care" (*Institutes* 1.16.1).

Which is to say, we are not left to our own devices. We're not left to go it on our own. God does not abandon us. As we pointed out last week, God never leaves or forsakes us.

When Jesus was on the cross, he pointed out how a new relationship could exist—one that was different from anything that had existed before.

In so many ways, Jesus was enacting God's providence, which not only cared for a grieving mother, but in doing so, demonstrated at a deeper level how this new family of faith might be called upon to care for a grieving world.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus was speaking to a group of people inside a house when his mother and his brothers showed up outside, wanting to speak to him.

Someone told Jesus, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

That's an important message for us to hear—especially on a day like today, when we recognize the members of this year's Confirmation Class.

They may not all be our own children—though one of them is our daughter—but all of them are here as members of our family of faith.

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Because it is true for all of us—we have all been called to be the family of God: formed by grace, informed by the Word, and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, it is none other than the Holy Spirit that takes our individual lives and unites us with God and with one another.

Make no mistake about it: it is the Holy Spirit who is ultimately responsible for that blessed transmission of faith from one generation to another—much like the faithful witness of our children's choirs this morning.

Apart from the love of God—which, from the cross, showed us what it means to be the family of God—without that love and grace, without the Spirit of God at work in our lives, we remain like individual bells—probably more noisy gongs or clanging cymbals than we might care to admit—but bells nonetheless.

Ah, but together, as we heard when our handbell choir played this morning—when our own unique notes come together in harmony—there is created a beautiful and resounding melody of a life lived together in faith.

We are undoubtedly different people: young and old, male and female, with different life experiences and different hopes and dreams. But we are bound together in Christ's love. And this family of God—it is called the Church.

And to the Church called forth wherever she is found, the mandate remains the same: "Here is your son. Here is your daughter. Here is your mother. Here is your father." And no matter how young or old you are—you are a child of God, a member of the very household of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.