

“Behold Your Son ... Behold Your Mother”  
by Rom A. Pegram (3/15/20)

Today, we’re going to move directly to our scripture for today, then hear from a witness who was at the cross with Jesus. This week, we go to *the Gospel of John* for the first time this season, hearing a bit of *his version* of what happened that day (John 19:25-27, NLT)...

Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.” <sup>27</sup> And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on, this disciple took her into his home.

Now, we hear from one who was there—Mary, the wife of Clopas...

I begged her not to follow as Jesus was led 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 as much as any woman ever loved a 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. There he hung, naked so as to humiliate 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.”

No mother should ever have to watch a child die, but especially on a cross—the agonizing death of crucifixion. The third time Jesus spoke from the cross, he spoke to his mother and the disciple he was closest to—John. It was a scene that was both moving and significant for the Christian life. With our scripture for today in mind, I invite

you to consider *a few ways these final words of Jesus speak to us today*... First, I want to take a close look at this:

**THE COURAGEOUS ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY**... And let's begin with the three at the cross: There were three women standing at the foot of the cross as Jesus suffered and died that day. John tells us they were: Mary, the mother of Jesus; her sister (in-law, by marriage), Mary, the wife of Clopas (Joseph's brother); and Mary of Magdala (Mary Magdalene), the woman who Jesus healed of her 'seven demons' (seven illnesses she suffered from). And John also notes that he, himself, was there at the cross with these women—an *eye-witness* to Jesus' words that we're hearing today...

Folks, as we consider these three women standing in the midst of what must have been a hostile crowd, I'm struck by the significant role women played in Jesus' ministry. *Listen to these examples*...

- It was the women who financially supported the work of Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8:1-3)...
- It was a woman who became the first missionary to the Samaritans (John 4:28-29)...
- It was a woman who anointed Jesus with oil in preparation for his death (Matt. 26:6-13), *another Mary in Jesus' life (sister of Martha and Lazarus)*...
- And it was women who first came to the tomb and found it empty on Easter morning (Mark 16:1-8)...
- It was a woman who first saw Jesus raised from the dead and, so, a woman who first proclaimed the Resurrection to others (John 20:11-18)...

Jesus regularly showed compassion, mercy, and love toward women in the Gospels, which stood out as *counter-cultural* in his day. His choice of twelve male 'formal disciples' was really a sign of the times ... but Jesus recognized the giftedness, courage, and commitment of women early on—including his mother. I'm thankful we no longer live in those days and can openly celebrate women in ministry today. *And we have plenty of gifted women in this church!* Now, let me focus in on the role of one...

Mary the mother of Jesus—one of the three at the cross: As we consider the role of these women in the life of Jesus, we need to also recognize that Mary the mother of Jesus is *the single most important human being to God's plan of salvation* aside from Jesus himself. Don't forget: It was Mary who gave up her life—as she knew it—in order to carry, deliver, and raise the Messiah. She told God (Luke 1:38, NLT): "...I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true...." And it did...

*This woman* who stood by the cross seeking desperately to console and give hope to her dying son *paid a great price for our salvation*. Let's not forget that, as we consider Jesus' words for today! Here's something else I see in this conversation:

**THE GIFT OF HONORING OTHERS IN JESUS' NAME...** Perhaps the most common understanding of today's passage is this: Even as Jesus hung on the cross dying in pain, Jesus was concerned for his mother. While Mary stood there, seeking to comfort and console her son, *Jesus made sure his mother would be taken care of after he was gone*. So, he asked John to care for his mother, and he asked his mother to accept John's protection and care.

In the spring of 2011, I was convicted of something in my life. It's not often God wakes me up in the middle of the night to tell me something, but it happened one morning that spring. I remember it as if it were yesterday; I shot straight up in bed (in the middle of the night) because I heard God speak to me clearly and all I heard was ... HONOR YOUR FATHER. My dad had already been experiencing some decline in his health and was dealing with those issues as he approached his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in June of 2011. And God was asking me to 'honor my father' at this time—deliberately and in some special way. So, I prayed about it and asked God what I was to do. I'd actually already done a CD of my father's memories for my siblings the Christmas before ... but now what? As I prayed about it, two things came to mind: 1) Throw a card party ... and 2) throw him a surprise birthday party he'd never forget!

Just so you know, both of those things happened in June 2011. I'd pulled off the card party and he received cards from all over the world, literally, that filled 3 huge three-ring binders once my sister'd cataloged them for him. And that same sister, from Florida, and I ... flew into Greensboro for Father's Day weekend 2010 (also his 80<sup>th</sup> BD), were at his church when he showed up for worship on Sunday morning, then stayed for a surprise birthday party at my cousin's house that afternoon. And I'll never forget Dad looking at both of us that morning (after he'd recovered) and he said, "I never dreamt that the two kids who challenged me the most while growing up would be here on this special day to honor me!" Little did we know that a little over a year later, we'd lose him...

Folks, don't wait! We need to reclaim what's been the practice throughout most of human history: caring for one's parents as Jesus was asking John to do for his mother. How is it that we can care for our parents and love them in special ways today? How can we be about the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment and HONOR our parents in creative and loving ways that will truly make a difference in their winter years? Finally, consider this from today's story...

**LOOKING TO JOHN AS THE CHURCH'S MODEL...** Some believe by relating these words of Jesus, John intends more than a simple witness for us to care for our parents; some believe John intends for us to understand from Jesus that, as his disciples, *we're responsible to care for one another*—even taking the role of parent or child or brother or sister to another who needs us. Let me share a short story with you to finish up today:

Roger is an elementary school teacher in Manhattan, Kansas—a member of a local United Methodist Church. One day, many years ago, Roger was working late. As he was leaving the school building, he noticed one of his students—a boy named Johnathon—sitting on the playground by himself. He asked the fourth grader why he

was at the playground so late. It was then he learned that Jonathon's mother had left the family and his father worked all night and struggled to care for him. Roger, the teacher, showed compassion and reassured Johnathon that things would be okay; then he sent the boy home. Roger took a special interest in Johnathon and began to look for ways to help him. With the year Johnathon was placed in a foster home as his father was unable to care for him. He eventually returned to his father's home though; but, once more, his father was unable to care for him. Knowing Johnathon would be sent back to foster care, his father asked the elementary school teacher—Roger—if he would take Johnathon into *his* home. Roger agreed and welcomed this child as if he were his own son. His role in caring for, mentoring, and shaping Johnathon's life gave Johnathon a radically different future than he might have had.

As it turned out, Johnathon was a gifted child who grew up to be a remarkable man. With Roger's help, he went to Kansas State University. He travelled across the country and to different parts of the world. He fell in love with a beautiful young woman and married her; together they went to serve the poor in South Africa before returning to Chicago, where Johnathon now works with inner-city boys who have no place to call home...

Folks, I'm telling you this story today because this story is not only a great example of how we as the Church—Christ-followers—can care for others in this world, but this story is real ... and it's personal! I first heard this story from Roger's pastor, who is also Roger's father-in-law. And the young woman Johnathon ended up marrying ... was that Kansas preacher's daughter. Little did the pastor know that as he was praying for the boy who would someday marry his daughter, he was also praying for the little boy whose troubled life would find stability and joy and hope because of the love of a teacher ... whose faith—*really, the love of Jesus*—compelled him to see this child as his own. And how grateful that pastor was for an instant grandson; And how grateful that pastor was ... that his son-in-law heard Jesus' words from the cross, "Behold, your son!"

So, do you see the LOVE? Yes, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice up there on the cross, dying to cover all our sin ... but he also wasn't done teaching ... and he'd taught John to do the same. Through Jesus' words today—"Behold your son" and "Behold your mother," we're reminded that we should be thankful for the gifted women God has placed in our midst—especially in the life of the Church, we should be about the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, honoring our parents ... and we should care for *all* who Jesus cares for ... as if they were our own family! Have you heard Jesus' words today?