

WOMAN, HERE IS YOUR SON...HERE IS YOUR MOTHER

*My soul glorifies the Lord, My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
The Lord looks on me a lowly servant; henceforth all ages will call me blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy is God's name!
God's mercy is from age to age, on those who are faithful.
God puts forth an arm in strength and scatters the proud-hearted.
Casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly.
God fills the hungry with good things, sends the rich away empty.
Protecting Israel, God's servant, remembering mercy,
the mercy promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham, Sarah and their children forever.*

According to Luke 1:46-55, these are the words that Mary sang before Elizabeth as she celebrated the joy and hope in this miracle child that God had given her.

Not once, but twice, Luke will tell us how she treasured up all the miraculous moments of Jesus' birth in her heart and pondered what they might mean.

But Luke also tells us of another message about her soul. When Jesus is presented in the temple, there is a man there named Simeon who had been promised by the Lord that he would see the Messiah in his time.

Simeon prophesied over Mary, and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:34-35).

However she treasured those words till now, she must have felt them fulfilled at the cross.

We've been reflecting upon the 7 last sayings of Jesus on the cross recorded in the Gospels. This one is unique because Jesus is addressing his mother and his friend - not because they say anything, but simply because he sees them.

Some have called it "the word of love" - for obvious reasons - because it portrays a sense of deep love between mother, son, and a dear friend.

John sets the scene for us. Let's review quickly: Who all is there?

- Mary, mother of Jesus. Soul-pierced/ grieving. Widowed, now losing her firstborn.
- Mary's sister - so Jesus' aunt - interesting because we don't often hear about relatives.
- Another Mary, married to a guy named Clopas - some suggest this as a variant spelling of Cleopas, who was one of the 2 disciples who spoke with Jesus on the Emmaus road.
- And Mary Magdalene - who joined the women who supported Jesus' ministry after Jesus healed her of 7 demons.

If we look to the other Gospels, we have a bit more information about this group:
(except for Luke, he just lists them as “the women who had followed him from Galilee”)

Matthew and Mark both put Mary Magdalene up front, possibly because of her prominent role in reporting the resurrection.

Then they describe the other Mary not as “wife of Clopas” but the mother of James the younger (one of the disciples) and Joseph.

And Matthew describes the 3rd individual as the Mother of Zebedee’s sons, while Mark gives the name Salome. Many commentators agree that these are likely the same person - meaning that the disciples James and John (the older) would actually be 1st cousins of Jesus!

This would also make some sense of why their mother may feel she can ask that Jesus give her boys a special place in his kingdom at his right and left side (Mt 20:20-23)

DISCLAIMER: *This is NOT certain, and even if it were it’s more of a factoid than anything else.*

But it would show (1) that the relationships between Jesus and the disciples was more complex than we perhaps realized, but also (2) that identity as brothers and sisters in Christ was more significant to the Gospel writers and the early church than any familial connections by blood.

That backdrop does give us interesting context for the significant exchange that takes place.

What happened?

Jesus sees two people standing near, his mother as well as “the disciple whom he loved” - which is generally accepted to be John, the son of Zebedee, and the author of this Gospel.

It seems almost a prideful way to refer to yourself in writing, but if you’ve ever undertaken to actually introduce yourself to others as “a child of God” or “loved by Jesus” then I think you’ll find that pride is not the emotion that typically flares up. For me it’s humility, gratitude, and an overwhelming sense that I’ve been the recipient of something wholly undeserved and yet freely offered nonetheless.

And from this text alone we might understand why John would call himself this. Because Jesus sees these two, and entrusts them to one another in his absence.

This disciple has been entrusted with the care of Jesus’ own mother.
And Mary to love this disciple as her own son.

If that’s not a special kind of love and honor, I don’t know what is.

So reflecting on love this morning, I want to suggest just 2 simple ways this passage can teach us how to love like Jesus, as well as a simple encouragement.

I. IF I'M TO LOVE LIKE JESUS: CARE FOR MY FAMILY (Lk 14:26; 1 Tm 5:8).

Maybe an obvious statement, but important to note that it's not secondary to our commitment to following Jesus. It's part of it.

You may remember that Jesus has at times spoken forcefully about choosing to follow him even when it threatens family bonds.

Luke 14:26 | *Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate their father and mother, wife, children, siblings, even their own life...such a person cannot be my disciple.²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."*

Most of us instinctively feel an obligation to care for family members, right? That would have been even more true in Jesus' culture where they prized family relationships so much.

So Jesus' statement is jarring. It's understandable that some would be confused. Even if we take it as Jesus saying we should love God so much, that our love for our families seems almost like hate in comparison... It seems like Jesus is asking us to minimize our responsibility to care for our family members.

But I want to suggest 3 reasons I feel confident that ISN'T what Jesus is saying:

FIRST - We see Jesus, even from the cross, taking time to make arrangements for his widowed mother's care.

His mission was costly. And it is causing his own mother great pain. Yet he remains committed both to the path of the cross AND the care of his mother.

SECOND - Jesus actually denounced the Pharisees for declaring finances that would have been used to help their parents as being "devoted to God" and thus not caring for them (Mark 7:11).

They had basically made a loophole for themselves. Instead of taking care of their aging parents, as would be expected of anyone else, they said that money should instead be considered as dedicated to God - really providing for THEM as religious leaders.

In contrast, Jesus wasn't talking about redirecting our funds from family to ministry. Jesus was talking about choosing to follow him into the kind of danger that may cause friction with the people who love us the most and don't want us to be in harm's way.

He's saying we should be prepared that they may not like the decision we make to follow him.

FINALLY - The early church maintained the importance of taking care of relatives. In a letter to his disciple Timothy, the apostle Paul notes that the church ought to care for widows who are in need, but also that any of their kids and grandkids ought to be their first line of support.

In 1 Tim 5:8 he is even as bold as to say, “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Our faith is expressed in our care for others. That is not limited to our own family, but it would be absurd if it did not include our family.

This may take many different forms. I know we have many who are doing this very thing...

- Taking in aging parents, grandparents, or nieces/nephews or grandkids in need.
- Providing financial support when you can't be present in person.
- Hiring caregivers if you cannot provide the care yourself.

...but the principle is the same: that followers of Christ ought to follow his example in caring for our families.

Even if they do not accept the way of life we have chosen.

Even if they are difficult. It doesn't really matter.

You do not have to agree with someone's lifestyle to care for them.

I could go on, but I don't want to stray too far from the point. Jesus cared for his family, and if we want to love like Jesus, we should care for ours as well.

But it doesn't stop with blood relations.

II. IF I'M TO LOVE LIKE JESUS: CARE FOR THOSE WITHOUT FAMILY (Jn 19:27).

There is an overwhelming theme throughout the old and new testaments of God's priority for the care of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (*all often lacking a network of support*).

In this case, the widow that Jesus is establishing care for is his own mother, and the caregiver is possibly a relative. At the very least, he is a trusted friend. We may well ask why Jesus chose John over his own brothers. Surely they would have been next in line?

By the way, yes, Jesus did have brothers. It's understandable if you missed it, because they are only mentioned briefly in the Gospels, but they are mentioned. *Mt 13:53-55 and Mk 6:3* note people wondering at Jesus' ministry saying, “Isn't this Joseph's boy? Aren't his brothers James and Jose's and Simon and Jude? Aren't his sisters among us?”

We even know that 2 of those brothers, James and Jude, would later become prominent leaders in the early church. We even have letters from them in our Bibles.

But that was later. *During his ministry* they did not believe all the hype about him.

Early in John chapter 7, there's a moment where Jesus is laying low because the religious leaders are actively looking for a way to have him killed.

But it says his brothers tease him, saying, *"Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."*

And John makes the comment there, *"For even his brothers did not believe in him."* (John 7:5)
At another point, Mark's Gospel says they tried to take him home because they thought he was out of his mind. (Mark 3:21)

Reading between the lines, I would not imagine that they were thrilled by the dangerous situation their mother is in just being near to him at the cross.

Does Jesus want to commit her to their care? No.
He chooses someone who trusts and understands.
And John does not hesitate (John 19:27).

The NIV says that he took her into his home (consistent with most translations). The Greek simply says he took her "into his own" - as if she were his own mother to care for.

Whether it's someone with no family or a strained family system, Jesus wants people to be cared for deeply as beloved Sons and Daughters, and the Church as the Family of God is the prime place for that to happen.

This is an increasing challenge in our world as age groups have become so stratified. There are fewer and fewer spaces where we spend time with people outside of our own age bracket.

But the kingdom of God is for all, and there is so much to learn from when we reach across these inadvertent barriers and love and care and serve those in other categories.

Again, there is no one right way to do this.

- Big Brother, Big Sister
- Foster parenting
- Visitation to care facilities, caring for our neighbors.

The possibilities are endless, but the principle here is that we look for ways to care for others sacrificially. In this way, we become family for those who have none, and a deeper sort of family than exists for even those with strong family ties.

I think this is the real guiding impulse behind that confusing teaching that Jesus gives when his family tried to get him, thinking he was crazy. The crowds were trying to tell him that his mom and brothers were looking for him.

He said, "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." (Mk 3:33-35; Mt 12:48-50)

I don't think he was trying to be dismissive of his family, certainly not his mother. But it seems he sensed they needed to grasp something important. I think he was showing them, and all of us, that family is more than we think.

It's not just about caring for loved ones because of familial duty. It's about caring for all people because we are united in His will and love for us.

And this is the Good News: That both Care for the Family and Care for the Least are rooted in the very same values of God's Kingdom. That all are precious sons and daughters of the King, and that Jesus is particularly close to the hurting and estranged.

So we have Mary - soul-pierced, widowed, with possibly some tension with her other children. We have John - once described as a son of thunder, desiring a special place of authority... now to be known as the apostle of love. His letters just oozing with compassion and affection. And we have Jesus - in this short moment, giving us a picture of what love is like in the family of God. Creating bonds of unity and compassion in the midst of pain.

CONCLUSION. THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus gives hope to the grieving and lonely, because he knows what it's like and he uniquely offers comfort and peace.

Jesus knows what it is like to have strained family relationships.

Jesus knows what it is like to be misunderstood.

Jesus knows what it is like to be ridiculed and dismissed by his own family.

Jesus knows what it is like to struggle to make peace when not everyone understands.

Jesus knows what it is like having to navigate care for your loved ones when you have few resources of your own.

But not only does Jesus empathize with us, he invites us into something better and more deeply fulfilling than we ever could have imagined. To love each of his beloved children as they were our own mother, father, sister, brother, son, or daughter.

He invites us into the Family of God.

He has enabled us to love, even when it's difficult, because he first loved us.

May we receive Jesus and all his family as our own.