

“Dear Woman, Here Is Your Son”

Goal: That the hearers believe more firmly that Jesus is their King crowned with thorns.

Text: Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text for our meditation are the third words of our Lord as he hung on the cross, which are recorded by St. John in the 19th chapter, verses 25 through 27. They read “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 his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”

Almost two thousand years ago as our Lord hung on the cross, there was a large crowd gathered around his feet. There were a few people who had come to make sure that justice was served to the two robbers who were crucified on either side of Jesus. There was a small contingent of Roman soldiers who were there to fulfill their duty. The bulk of the crowd was certainly those who had clamored for our Lord’s crucifixion and were there to make sure that this blasphemous rabbi was murdered in the most painful and humiliating way possible. But there was also, near the foot of the cross, a small group of women and one disciple, who had come to support their teacher; and among this small group was Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Now as Mary stood there crying and watching her oldest son die, she must have wondered how this was possible. This wasn’t how her son’s life was supposed to end. You see, some thirty odd years ago, when Mary was only a teenager, she had miraculously become pregnant. An angel had come to her, called her blessed and said that she had found favor with God. She would soon give birth to a child who would be called the Son of the Most High; and as

a descendant of David, he would sit on the throne of Israel forever. No doubt all of this seemed very surreal to Mary – an immaculate conception, a virgin birth, angels from heaven and her baby the very Son of God – but Mary trusted the Lord and surrendered herself to His will and in nine short months, her miracle child was born.

Now, in contrast to what you might have imagined, it wasn't easy being the mother of Jesus. As a poor peasant and the wife of a carpenter, how do you raise the next king of Israel? There were no manuals to read and their meager subsistence was anything but princely. To make matters worse, Jesus was completely unlike the other children. Although he was never self centered or selfish, the fact that he was different was painfully obvious to everyone around. And the fact that Jesus was perfect didn't make his family life easier either. His perfection only magnified how sinful and inadequate Mary felt as his mother. Every time there was a conflict or misunderstanding, she knew that it had to be her fault. How could the son of God ever be wrong? And possibly the only thing more difficult than raising the son of God was growing up in his shadow. The brothers and sisters of Jesus followed an example that no sibling could ever live up to. And yet, whenever things got too difficult, whenever the task seemed too daunting, Mary remembered the events surrounding Jesus' birth, the birth of her miracle child.

Life wasn't easy, but Mary's family always seemed to get by and life moved along smoothly for a long time. But all of that seemed to change about three years ago. Mary had always known that one day Jesus would stop being a carpenter; but instead ascending to a kingly throne, he started hanging around with his cousin John. Now normally, Mary tried to promote close family ties but John was different. He wandered the countryside eating honey and bugs and, worst of all, he provoked the religious leaders. That wasn't the life Mary wanted for her son; and things only seemed to get worse when Jesus went out and hand picked twelve disciples

for himself. These weren't the normal up and coming religious students you would associate with the prominent rabbis; these were tax collectors and illiterate fisherman – the absolute dregs of society – they were sinners. Mary saw Jesus' life going in the wrong direction and she wanted to intervene – but it wasn't her place to interfere with his life. And so Jesus, together with his disciples, wandered from town to town, unemployed, living off of the handouts from strangers.

Mary didn't have a hard time keeping track of her son. You see reports about his ministry were all the gossip of Nazareth. There were fanciful stories of incredible teachings, miraculous healings and even a few resurrections. Mary found most of these stories hard to believe but harmless all the same. What troubled her most were the stories of how Jesus was deliberately breaking the Sabbath day, accusing the priests of hypocrisy and hanging around with Samaritans and prostitutes. Things had gotten so bad that a local priest even declared that Jesus was demon possessed. Well that was more than Mary could take, so she gathered up Jesus' brothers and they all set out to talk with him, maybe even get him some help. She arrived at the house where Jesus was preaching and from the front lawn she sent a servant in to let Jesus know she would like to speak with him; but what happened next she never expected. In front of the whole crowd Mary's miracle baby, her oldest son, all but disowned her. When Jesus heard that his mother was outside, Jesus turned to the crowd and said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And then pointing to the people sitting at his feet he said "Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." No doubt Mary went away confused and heart broken. Her miracle son had chosen a life that was completely at odds with everything she knew. It seemed that the angel had been wrong. Jesus would never be a king.

From this point on, the gospels don't tell us much about Mary. Chances are that over the next few years Jesus and Mary didn't talk very much. His radical friends and ministry didn't quite agree with Mary's simple devotion to family and church. In fact, at times it seemed as though he cared for everyone else but her. She continued to get reports on what he was doing; but she never tried to interfere again. Being disowned once was more than enough.

And then came the spectacular events of the past week. You see this year, like many before, Mary decided to come down to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. It was almost a weeks journey from Nazareth and Mary had set out early to make sure she could get a hotel room; but as she came closer to holy city, she started hearing reports that Jesus was there too. He had arrived on Sunday to shouts of Hosanna, but before long he started preaching against the Pharisees and disrupting services at the temple. Mary arrived in Jerusalem anxious about what she would see and learn and she tried to celebrate the Passover; but Mary couldn't help but wonder where Jesus was and what he was doing.

And then came Friday morning. Mary got up early and the whole city was buzzing with talk of Jesus. Apparently he had been arrested the night before. He had claimed to be the Son of God; and now, the Sanhedrin was insisting that he be crucified. Mary threw on her robe and rushed down to the palace just in time to see Jesus being flogged; and at the sight of her son, torn and bloodied, she collapsed into a flood of tears. Over the next few hours, Mary felt everything her son did and as they pounded the nails into his feet and hands, her body convulsed with every sound of the hammer. There was a great commotion at the foot of the cross and for several hours the crowds came and went as Jesus hung on the cross. Yet through all the commotion, Mary stood there crying as her miracle son was dying. And then Jesus found her; and although the two of them hadn't spoken in quite some time, he looked into her eyes with a love and a concern that

was beyond words. And through the pain and tears he said, “Dear woman, here is your son.”

And then to the disciple that he loved and trusted he said, “Here is your mother.” As Mary stood there, she could not see how Jesus had fulfilled the angel’s promise. She could not see him as a king or as the son of God. His crown was made of thorns. His royal robes had been borrowed and then cruelly torn away; and the only throne he ascended was this cross which was imposed upon him. This was not the life Mary had envisioned for her son; and yet even as Christ was dying on the cross, he cared for his mother and provided for her physically and spiritually as only a king could – as only the son of God could.

Today, almost two thousand years later, we too gather at the foot of the cross. Some of us have come to hear the spectacle of how Jesus was crucified, some to see how justice is served and our sins are atoned for, and some to say goodbye to our teacher and friend. And yet even though we have all come for different reasons, like Mary, we look up to the cross and we have a hard time seeing our king. Covered from head to toe in his own blood, he does not hold a position of power or prestige like a king or a president or senator. Gasping for air, he does not command our obedience through fear or intimidation. And with his hands pierced and pinned against the cross beam, he doesn’t command great armies or nations. In fact, Jesus is exactly the opposite of every conceptual idea we have of power and glory. Yet, there is no earthly king or president that can give us what we truly need; for it is only through his humiliation that he provides for our every need. It is only because of his weakness that we are made strong. It is only by his stripes that we are healed; and it is only by his death, the death of our king, that we gain eternal life. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting, Amen.