

## “Here is Your Son... Here is Your Mother”

Jesus wasn't a Momma's boy. Consider these verses you will never find in a Mother's Day card, *Matthew 10:37 (NRSV)* <sup>37</sup> *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; Luke 8:21 (NRSV)* *“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”* *Luke 14:26 (NRSV)* *“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.*

I can imagine Mary hearing him say these things, seeing people look at her with shocked expressions, and shaking her head as she said to herself, “That boy!”

There's quite a contrast between these words of Jesus and this third word Jesus utters on the cross: *John 19:26–27 (NRSV)* <sup>26</sup> *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.”* <sup>27</sup> *Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”* *And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*

Does Jesus have a change of heart on the cross? Does he suddenly realize that as her eldest son, he has responsibilities; he has to create a last will and testament that will provide for his mother after his death? Or is there something more going on? Is this third word from the cross something more than a touching personal moment between a mother and her son?

### The Communities at the Cross

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Now, lest I never see another lemon bar again, I want to be clear that Jesus loved his mother and cared for her, and all of us should do the same! Jesus is the one who fulfills the law, so the commandment remains: *Exodus 20:12 (NRSV)* *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.* And of course, nothing makes a long day a good day like lemon bars!

So Jesus is making a last will and testament; he is caring for his mother and fulfilling his responsibilities to her as her eldest son. Yes, he's not a momma's boy; he's his own man, but he's not a bad boy either; he is a good son. We'll return to this topic in a minute or two, but first, let's broaden our gaze for a moment to take in the whole scene, because when we look at the scene in its entirety, we can

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understand that something more is going on and what that something more is.

The whole scene shows us a stark contrast; *John 19:25 (NRSV) ... standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.* Near this group were four soldiers. They'd already torn his clothes into four parts. Now, they were rolling the dice to see who would win his nice linen tunic. They were dividing up the spoils. Since they knew they were going to be there a while, crucifixion isn't quick nor is it meant to be, they had a long day ahead, so they probably took their time. Why put it all on one roll of the dice when you can have hours of enjoyment? They can break up the monotony and have some fun! So they roll the dice, and roll the dice. They laugh. They curse. One wins; three lose; a good time is had by all.

Quite a contrast and it is a contrast we are meant to see. The kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God stand out in sharp relief on Calvary. We see both communities for what they are: In the one, merriment is made out of someone's misery. In the other, compassion and concern are the order of the day. In the one there are winners and losers. In the other needs are met and no one is left without. One community victimizes; the other offers safety and security.

We see a community that cares and a community that doesn't. Which one are we?

### A Community that Cares

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One of our goals for 2012 is to grow our church. We want to have more members at the end of this year than we do now.

Every church wants to grow, but many churches don't. When we grow this year, we will be in the minority in Berks County, in Lehigh Presbytery, the Synod of the Trinity, the Presbyterian Church USA, and in the Protestant church in North America. Globally is another story for another Sunday. We'll be in good company there.

We will grow by being like the community near the cross; a community that cares; in the words of the evangelism initiative from the 2008 General Assembly, we will “Grow Christ's Church Deep and Wide.”

The gospels record 7 last words of Jesus on the cross; 7, that's not many, so it is

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highly significant that one of these 7 final words focuses on caring for one another. When Jesus says to Mary, “*Woman, here is your son,*” and to John, “*Here is your mother,*” the language suggests that he’s doing more than stating the obvious; they’re standing right next to each other; they’ve met! But he is re-defining their relationship. Mary’s son is God’s Son and He reveals to them who they are and what they are to do; in so doing, He creates a community that cares.

This community crosses boundaries. Mary is not John’s mother; John is not her son, but in the community that cares which Jesus is creating, they are family, and they will care for one another for the rest of their days.

Every church cares; we care, just this week we were part of the remarkable community response to the needs of Eric, the 9 year-old boy who was hit by a car. We care. We cared, so what does this word invite us to be and do?

Whenever there is an urgent need, people respond, because we care. Whether its money and supplies to help the people affected by natural disasters like the tornadoes down south, or Hurricane Katrina, or the tsunami victims, we respond because we care.

But what about the needs that aren’t urgent; the needs that are chronic, ongoing; who cares when the headlines fade and the emotional wave subsides? Who cares when there are no headlines and the white hot spotlight is focused elsewhere? Who cares for the lonely and the forgotten? Who pays attention to those it’s so easy to forget?

We do, because we are Pennside Presbyterian Church. We are sent to serve. We are a community that cares.

This third word from the cross invites us make caring for one another a practice, a habit; something we do regularly rather than as a reaction to some stimulus.

Now, before we rush off to find someone to care for, a couple of caveats: First, all too often, when a church says, “We’re a friendly, caring church,” what they mean is “we’re friendly and caring with the people we know.” But birds of a feather who stick together do not grow the flock! So, we go to the opposite extreme, and care only for the new folks who come our way, and after they’ve been here a while (and

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have joined the church!) we ignore them like all the rest. These birds fly the coop, because they feel like they’re victims of a bait and switch scam.

A cartoon I saw posted on Facebook this week suggests a way for us to respond to Jesus’ invitation to be a community that cares in a way that avoids both of these classic pitfalls.

The cartoon showed Darth Vader, but in the place of his mask, there was a cassette tape; and the cassette tape said to a glowing iPod, “I am your father.”

I laughed out loud when I saw it. Then I wondered, “Does the iPod generation know what a cassette tape is (or should I say – was)?” “Do they get the Star Wars reference?”

What generations are there in our church? We have iPads, iPods, and CD’s in jewel cases; we have cassette and 8 track tapes; there might even be an audiophile with a reel-to-reel in the closet, and surely there are some of us with phonographs that play 33 and 78 rpms.

*“Here is your son...here is your mother.”* Here is the challenge: Make caring a habit. Between now and Easter, get to know someone in our church that you don’t know. Reach across the digital divide, and introduce yourself. Yes, it will be awkward at first. New habits are always awkward at first, but take that first step, and by Easter Sunday, our church will have grown deeper because of the relationship that has formed. Then, on Easter, look around, cross the divide again. It will be awkward, but not as bad as the first time.... Then at Scottish Communion.... Then when we have communion in the summer... and then ... and then. Make caring a habit.

As our church grows deeper in this way, we will grow wider. We will develop the capacity to connect with people who aren’t like us. We will develop the ability to communicate that we care and to demonstrate how we care.

And we will grow, one act of caring at a time, one relationship at a time; we will grow “deeper and wider” as we respond to Jesus’ invitation, *“Woman, here is your son.... here is your mother.”* Amen.