



John 19:25–27

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' 27 and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Reflection

John has been circumspect in his language. He hasn't used many words. Because what has been done to Jesus is unspeakable, even amongst the brutality of the ancient world. Jesus has been crucified. Crucifixion, it's where we get the word 'excruciating' – because it was excruciating. And the accounts of crucifixion in the gospels, as brief as they are, are some of the longest accounts of crucifixion in ancient literature. Because even the ancients thought it was obscene; obscene comes from 'off scene', too horrendous to be written down. In one rare mention in ancient literature, a Roman citizen goes on holidays, right after a crucifixion, and when he returns home, to his horror the victim is still alive. It was a slow, torturous and utterly accursed way to die. Last week

we read simply,

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.
17 Carrying his own cross, he went
out to the place of the Skull (which
in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18
There they crucified him,

Red fire is consuming his wrists and ankles, a nail each through his wrists and one through both his ankles. His entire body weight is supported by those nails which are more like metal stakes. Only they're more than supporting him, he needs to pull himself up by them if he is going to breathe. Fresh and dried blood covers his face from his crown of thorns. The lacerations on his back throb and bleed. He's reeling from the shock, weak from blood loss, and bruised and swollen

from the beating that he's received. And the interminable cycle of horror continues, over and over again. He pulls himself up with his arms and pushes with his legs, just enough to open his chest cavity so that he can breathe, his wrists and ankles screaming with the pain. One breath, and then he collapses down again, until the demand for oxygen forces him to pull and push himself up some more. Over and over again.

Taking in this sight at the foot of the cross, we read from today's passage:

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he

loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' 27 and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

At the foot of the cross we find a group of four remarkable women. They stand in sharp contrast to the four soldiers callously dividing up Jesus' garments by the roll of the dice. Four women, and four soldiers. The contrast is unavoidable. It's hard to imagine the pain of those four women. If you have lost a loved one in the prime of their life then perhaps you understand. Before Mary's very eyes, the baby she had nursed, the baby she had held in her arms, sung to and raised, her first-born son who'd brought her so much joy, is being tortured to death and she is pow-

erless to do anything. The other gospels tells us that the second woman, ‘his mother’s sister’ (19:25), is Salome, the mother of James and John. We don’t know who Mary the wife of Clopas is, however we do know a great deal about Mary Magdalene – seven demons had been cast out of her by Jesus, later she would wet Jesus feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with perfume.

A brief aside. Three Mary’s at the cross. A detail that historians would say points to historical reliability. If this was made up, what author would give three of the four women the same name? And yet here we have, Mary mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene and Salome, wife of Zebedee, mother of James and John. And one other standing beside

Mary, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Most think that this is John, the author of the gospel, and the disciple closest to Jesus, diverting attention from himself out of humility and so that we can focus on his Lord. And so we will.

Jesus is in limitless pain. He's desperately fighting for every breath, pulling and pushing himself up on the nails driven through his ruined wrists and ankles to stave off asphyxiation; his lacerated back moving up and down across the rough timber of the cross. Lingered at the fringes of death and contemplating the cosmic battle against Satan, sin and death, the separation from his Father and the pouring out of his Father's wrath on him for the sins of the world that awaits him; even in this horrifying moment, Jesus thinks not of himself but of

his own.

26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' 27 and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'

'John, this is your mother, and, Mary, this is your son.'

United in their grief, one watching her precious son die, the other watching his closest friend in the world being tortured to death; they're now united, by Jesus, for life. And as with everything Jesus does, this is just perfect. John's the youngest disciple and according to church history, the only disciple not to be martyred. He'll

die of old age. And he's also the disciple that can't stop talking and writing about love, just read his letters. In short, he's the perfect choice to take care of Jesus' mum after he's gone.

Think

As you reflect over this passage for yourself today, it's hard not to do so with a lump in your throat. And yet there is a richness here even amongst the sadness. Look at these brave women. Peter and the other ten disciples are in hiding. These four women are risking their lives at the foot of the cross, openly identifying with one who is being crucified for treason. Such courage and bravery, amidst such distress and pain.

Yet, impossible as it might seem in this mo-

ment, shortly they will be rejoicing over the events of this day. Our heavenly Father has the capacity to take what the world meant for evil and turn it into good. It's the same with our suffering. In the moment, we might not understand it, and we can be sure that God is grieving with us seeing sin's devastating effects playing out in the world he loves so much; but very often our heavenly Father takes our tragedy and graciously redeems and repurposes it for good, as he will do with the grief and pain surrounding Jesus' tragic death in our passage today.

Then there is John. Suddenly thrust upon him is the care of Mary; no doubt a great blessing but also a burden, caring for her in later life. Being a Christian can be like that, can't it. We'd like to think that the

more we love God the less he'll ask of us, and the lighter our burdens will become. But this is not necessarily so. If we love Jesus, he'll make use of our love. Jesus' care for John came in the form of a burden, but that burden will be a blessing. Perhaps Jesus is doing something similar in your life as well right now?

And finally, so striking in today's passage is the way Jesus cares for his mother and his closest friends, even as he suffers the agonies of the cross. Two thousand years later, Jesus still offers loving care and provision for his own. John may now call Mary his 'mother', but because of what Jesus did on this day we can now call God our 'Father'. John was adopted into Mary's family to love and care for her. But on Good Friday, we were adopted into the family of

God, to be under his loving care and protection and provision for the rest of eternity.

Pray

Pray today over this heart-rending adoption scene; the adoption of John into Mary's family, and our adoption into the family of God. Pray for those who are suffering like these women and John. Pray that God would turn their suffering into joy just like he did for them; that he would take what Satan meant for evil in their lives and turn it into good. And praise God this morning once more for what Jesus went through for us.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 11:11–12).