



Sermon Series: The Seven Last Words of Jesus

“Woman, Here is Your Son”

Preaching Text: John 19:26-27

16 March 2014—Second Sunday in Lent

FUMC, Arlington, Texas 76011

Today we continue to discover the “Seven Last Words of Jesus.” I learned this week that the “Seven Words series” was a favorite of the “old time preachers.” Yet, for some reason current church preaching neglects Jesus’ last words, beyond the Good Friday Vigil that occurs from 12:00 noon until 3:00 p. m.

Our prior “Last Words” have come from Luke. Today’s lesson is John 19:25-27:

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26] When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” [27] Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (John 19:25-27).

From the start, Mary knew that her relationship with Jesus was to be unique. We need not remind anyone about the miraculous nature of Jesus’ birth. We know nothing biblically of Jesus’ childhood, because after the birth we have a gap of some twelve years. Luke then furnishes an account of Jesus in the temple. However, as nature abhors a vacuum, so too do human beings. Lacking stories about Jesus’ childhood, new Gospels appeared to fill in the gaps. These extra (spurious, apocryphal) accounts of Jesus’ early life include the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Thomas. In one pseudo-Gospel, Jesus plays with some friends. The boys fashion clay birds and when the elders catch them on the Sabbath, the boys know they are in trouble. Yet, Jesus claps his hands and his birds fly away. Thus, as the elders rebuke his



friends, Jesus gets off scot-free because there is no evidence of his Sabbath violation. These and other non-Gospel stories give us at least a flavor of just how unique Jesus is. Mary, as Jesus' mother, would have known this all too well.

Plainly, being Messiah's mother could have not been easy. When the time came for purification fitting the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought the boy to Jerusalem. There Simeon told Mary at Jesus' circumcision that, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too?" (Luke 2). Thus, Mary knew that her motherhood was a challenge of the first order. Later, Jesus' own words, as well as those of Simeon's, bear out this truth.

Once Mary and Jesus attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Mary told Jesus, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." This is no way for a son, Messiah or not, to speak to his mother. Yet, Jesus' words always had a deeper meaning and purpose. Perhaps Mary knew this instinctively, because she then told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2). While said with authority, Jesus' words must have cut Mary to the quick.

On another occasion a crowd was around Jesus; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." Jesus replied: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:32-35). To be human and a family member is to feel the sting of these words. Yet, as Luke's Gospel tells us, on such occasions "Mary pondered these things in her heart" (Luke 1:29, 2:19). Mary



never knew exactly what to make of her enigmatic son's words.

Yet, for modern people the strangest and most offensive thing Jesus says to his mother are these words he utters from the cross. Jesus says, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." Some, of course, will take these as words of comfort, but to the current ear they imply paternalism or overprotectiveness. No one likes others to treat us in such a protective way, as if we could not care for ourselves. We could say that Jesus gives his mother to his beloved disciple. Jesus' words from the cross suggest that Mary needs care and in the first century this seems likely. Yet, to our day, these words trouble our ears. Today we speak of all people—male and female—who thrive on empowerment, fulfillment, and self-actualization. We are autonomous. We do not need anyone taking care of us. We can take care of ourselves.

Other than marriage rituals that ask, "Wilt thou obey," few bits of a marriage ceremony cause brides to "throw on the brakes" more than being delivered from the father to the groom. One young woman told me, "My father does not tell me what to do, Preacher, and my husband won't either, I assure you." She convinced me. Increasingly, parity is an important facet of up-to-date weddings. As C. S. Lewis once said, "It is pride that has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began." Stand your ground is our theme.

Yet Mary, first dependent on husband Joseph, then on son Jesus, is now handed off to John. Jesus instructs him to take Mary to his house and care for her. What is the secret of Mary's willingness to allow others to care for her in a manner that appears to modern folks as something like a transfer of



property? It is simply this: Mary makes herself wholly available to God in her willingness to follow the lead of her son. In Mary's total availability to God, Mary is entirely independent and totally dependent upon God's providing. True availability to God overcomes the fear of being dependent on others, because God provides. And for us moderns, here is the kicker: It is our determination to be independent by being in control that makes us unavailable to God. This unavailability the old timers called "PRIDE." Pride's opposite is humility, meekness, or having an unassuming spirit. Did Mary chase a creed of self-promotion? No, but she did know a thing or two about humility before God.

Availability is letting God have God's way, even when it pushes us toward the cross. For those available, life is at God's disposal, kept in readiness for what God may be up to. All time is God's time—the Bible calls it the "fullness of time." Real faith, like Mary steadily displayed, knows of what Paul writes, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

And after all, pride makes fools of us all. Heavyweight boxer James (Quick) Tillis was a cowboy from Oklahoma who fought in Chicago in the 1980s. He remembered his first day in the Windy City after his arrival from Tulsa. He recalls, "I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago. In front of the Sears Tower I put my suitcases down. I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, 'I'm going to conquer Chicago.' When I looked down, the suitcases were gone." Pride!

Six years ago we held a funeral for a well beloved local man whose family had no church. Someone asked, "Why do we always let people use our



sanctuary when they don't have a church?" Not a bad question.

My answer is that at the point of people's needs, we do not check their credentials as to whether or not they are worthy to use our church. To be more precise, I think, we check our own credentials. Does our faith in Jesus Christ call for us to be available to others and to God as Mary's faith made her available? Do our credentials prove to others that we say along with Jesus, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)? If this is the deep desire of your hearts then recommit yourselves today Amen.

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