

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: March 27, 2011
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HERE IS YOUR SON”
John 19:25-27

Anyone who says that Jesus’ teachings were “nice” or “inoffensive” has not read some of them very closely. The Gospels are riddled with provocative sayings. The hardest ones are about family relationships.

■ Mark 3:32-35: **“They told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’”**

■ Luke 9:59-62:

[Jesus] **said to another man, “Follow me.”**

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

■ Matthew 10:37-38: **“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”**

■ Luke 14:26-27: **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – even life itself ... cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”**

■ Matthew 23:9: **“Do not call anyone on earth *father*, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”**

□ Christ’s Third Word from the cross may (or may not) make these teachings less provocative, but it does clarify their meaning. Please turn to John 19:25-27:

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 her, “*Woman, here is your son,*” and to the disciple, “*Here is your mother.*” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

What is this interaction about? *Is it primarily an act of care* for Mary’s physical needs? No.

Mary is a first century widow who needs a man to protect and provide for her; but she has four other sons to do that. We know this, because when the

people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus they said: **“Isn’t this... the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?”** (Mark 6:1-3)

As an aside, the Roman Catholic Church is staunchly committed to the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity. Hence, Catholic theologians teach that either {Epiphanius} Joseph had these children by a previous marriage or {Jerome} they were actually Jesus’ cousins. But the doctrine of perpetual virginity has no biblical foundation. Read this text apart from it, and the natural conclusion {Helvidius} is that these were Christ’s younger half-siblings.

Either way, those men are obligated to care for Mary. As deeply compassionate as the Lord is toward his mother, this is not mainly a demonstration of care.

So, *what is this interaction about?*

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and [John] standing nearby, he said... ‘Woman, here is your son,’ and... ‘Here is your mother.’”

Until now, Mary and John have been friends. But the words **“mother”** and **“son”** come from the vocabulary of family relations. Jesus is announcing the creation of a new family.

☑ What is a family? It is a social unit consisting of people who share a mutual bloodline.

☺ In natural families the bloodline is biological.

It is established when God combines a couple’s physical DNA to create children. Those parents and children are more closely related to each other than to anyone else. They are a family.

(Of course, couples who have no children or who adopt are families, too. Yet the basic archetype consists of a man, a woman, and their offspring.)

And obviously there is more to a family than the gene pool. Still, the bloodline is foundational: that is why it feels tragic when hospitals get babies mixed up and send them home with the wrong parents.

☺ In this new family of Jesus the bloodline is spiritual.

It was established when Jesus shed his blood for the purpose of “[bringing] **many sons and daughters to glory.**” For {Jn 1:12-13} **“to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”**

These who receive the Son are related to his Father as children, and to each other as brothers and sisters. It is as though the blood of Jesus flows through their veins. In mind and soul and spirit they are more closely related to each other than to anyone else. They are a family.

👤 In the Old Covenant, space in the household of God was limited to Israel. As the Almighty said to them: {Dt 14:1-2} **“You are [my] children... Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.”**

Gentiles could enter the covenant through an arduous process of conversion; but by and large the children of God were the biological descendants of Abraham.

☪ But in {Lk 22:20} **“the new covenant in [Jesus]’ blood,”** those who are {Gal 3:26, 29} **“in Christ Jesus...are all children of God through faith”** regardless of genetic lineage, **“For... If [we] belong to Christ, then [we] are Abraham’s [offspring].”** {Eph 1:7, 5} **“In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood,”** for **“in love”** [God the Father] **he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus.”**

All of this (and more) is hinted at in Jesus’ words from the cross: **“here is your son,” “Here is your mother.”**

☪ 1st, the cross unites Christ Followers in a spiritual family that smashes worldly barriers.

☆ It is the blood of Jesus that secures our place as children in the family of God.

And so the cross blows the doors of the church wide open. Everyone in the bloodline of Jesus belongs here. {Gal. 3:26-28} **“In [him] [we] all are children of God through faith, for all of [us] who were baptized into Christ have clothed [ourselves] with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.”** That is God’s perspective.

We do not always share it, do we? Local churches tend to impose extra qualifications for belonging that go beyond {Eph 1:5, NRSV} **“adoption ... through Jesus.”** Far too often we reconstruct worldly divisions of race, ethnicity, economic standing, social status, and political conviction inside the Church. Far too often, brothers and sisters who look or speak or vote differently are made unwelcome.

☑ If and when we do that, we are not being the Church. The cross unites us in a spiritual family that smashes worldly barriers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this {Life Together}: **“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”**

☪ 2nd, the cross requires Christ Followers to manifest sacrificial love and pure holiness, first and foremost to each other and also to others.

☆ The blood of Jesus defines the quality of our relationships as brothers and sisters.

As for *love*, {Ro 5:8, 8:7} **“God demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners,” “hostile to God”** and unable to obey, **“Christ died for us.”** For that reason, Scripture commands: {Php 2:5-8}

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

As for holiness the Word says, {1 Pe 1:14-15} **“As obedient children, do not conform to... evil desires... Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.”**

Holiness is a standing before God and an inner condition that is demonstrated in ethical behavior. It empowers us to think, speak and act truthfully, justly and honorably. Holiness changes: how we eat, drink, exercise and rest; what we do with our sexuality; how we get and use money and things; the way we work for employers and deal with employees; the way we talk to and about people; the images and words we put in our minds; and so on. This is not a secondary concern! {Eph 5:25} **“Christ loved the church and [shed his blood] for her to make her ... holy and blameless.”**

The cross requires us to manifest sacrificial love and pure holiness.

“Woman, here is your son....Here is your mother.” Jesus is announcing the creation of a whole new family!

Are we part of his family? And do we bear the family resemblance – do our attitudes, thoughts, words, deeds and relationships reveal that we are sons and daughters of God?