

Sermon #34
John 19:25-30
Good Friday Message 4,10,20

Forming a New Bond

Scene 1: Mary at the cross

I. The original bond is severed

Through tear-stained eyes she sees his bloody face and badly beaten body. How was a mother ever supposed to deal with a son tortured to death before her very eyes? No other grief or pain could be greater. And yet, she had endured his shameful trial, the long, dreadful journey to Golgotha, the earthquake, and nearly six grueling hours of excruciating agony on the cross. She most certainly felt helpless; there was nothing she could do to change his unbearable fate.

None of us ever want to walk down that road with Mary, and yet tonight on this day we call Good Friday, we walk with her again and feel her sorrow – the loss of her beloved son. We know that Mary was at the cross, because John mentions her there in the passage that I just read. He notes that Mary was standing beside two other Mary's – Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. We could call them the 3 Ms, the 3 M company. Along with the women stands the disciple that Jesus loved. That would be John himself. You can focus on anyone of those grieving disciples, but let's keep our gaze on Mary.

I'm standing at the foot of the cross in our sanctuary tonight, attempting to empathize with those who were at the cross that day, but most especially Mary. Mary doesn't know that Sunday is coming. For Mary, it's Friday and it's all over. There's nothing left. All hope is gone with her son's death. Every follower of Jesus feels this pain and yet Mary bears the burden far greater, the excruciating death of her son.

For Mary, the special bond of mother to son is severed. She knows that she will never see him again in this life. This is not what she had hoped for her child. Can you feel her broken heart? What has brought you pain, sorrow, or separation? What brokenness have you experienced? Many in our world of COVID-19 are fearful of the ill health of a family member isolated in a hospital. Others are grieving the loss of friends and family member(s). On this Good Friday, there is much pain and tragedy in our global community. Mary knows your pain. She stands with you in your anguish. And you stand with her in her pain. We're all in good company with Mary.

We don't know what Mary was thinking at that moment, other than the extreme agonizing loss. Perhaps, sometime during that ordeal, she looked back on her son's birth and all her fond memories came with his birth. That was when the bond was formed, actually even before his birth.

Scene 2: Mary remembers the birth of her son

II. The bond was formed

Yes, during those agonizing six hours at the foot of the cross, Mary could have remembered how Joseph had obeyed the angel's message to not divorce her but take her home to be his wife. But even more so, she probably recalled to mind that special moment she herself had with the visit of the angel Gabriel to her home. "Do not be afraid," he had said. "Mary, you have found favor with God." What greater blessing could there be than to find favor with one's God! Then he told her about the special child that she would bear. "He would be called the Son of the Most High. He will reign on his throne forever." It was extremely difficult to see how that would be the case now while watching him slowly die before her.

Perhaps the words that she might recall now would be more those of Simeon's, the old man in the temple. On the eighth day after his birth, Mary and Joseph had gone to the temple to present the baby Jesus. There they met the old man Simeon who had been waiting for the Lord's anointed one – to see him before he died. Simeon had been so thrilled to see the little one in his arms. He blessed the child and spoke of him as the way of salvation and a light for all people. But then Mary recalled even more, the words of warning that he gave her that day, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35). And indeed, it had. This day, on the hill of Golgotha, just outside the city gates, the sword had come slashing through the depths of her soul and she would never be the same again.

Yes, the bond had been formed in the announcements and in his birth and throughout his life. But now, as she stood there at the cross feeling totally helpless and broken, a new bond begins to form. She doesn't know it yet.

Scene 3: Mary and John at the cross

III. A new bond forms

With tears continually streaming down her face, she hears his familiar voice. It's faint and crackling, spoken in the midst of great suffering and pain. She dares to turn her head upward again, seeing his face and his words one last time.

"Dear woman," he begins. Her son had often spoken to her that way. Perhaps she recalled the moment at the wedding in Cana when she had called on Jesus because there was no more wine. He had said, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." She had been so certain that he would do what was right and best for the bride and groom. And he did so in such a miraculous way, turning water into wine, his first public miracle. But now, he spoke those words again, "Dear woman." This time from the cross, his broken body and spilled blood would make a new sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, a different miracle.

But most likely unaware of the greater significance, the greater sacrifice, Mary simply hears those precious words again. “Dear woman, here is your son.” And then to the disciple he loved, to John standing nearby, he says, “Hear is your mother.”

So, what is Jesus doing here? In that day, a crucified man had the right to make a testamentary disposition, as one might do in adoption. This could even be done from the cross. Thus, Jesus makes use of that right. In the formula of Jewish law, he places his mother under the protection of the apostle John. A great sentiment and caring act indeed.

And yet, is there more to this than a caring deed and a simple legal transaction? Could it be that Jesus is doing something even deeper? Yes, he is taking care of his mother in the proper way. That in itself is a marvelous thing to do. But more than that, Jesus is once again affirming the bond of Christian fellowship.

Mary and John may not even be aware of all the deeper ramifications here. Perhaps later they realized the richer purpose. But maybe they did recall Jesus’ words in a crowded house back in Galilee. His family had come to visit him. They stood outside the home calling to him while a large crowd gathered inside. Someone told Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you?” And Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Then he looked around those seated next to him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35)

Now here at the cross, the new bond of Christian fellowship is being born right before their eyes. This bond is far greater and deeper than all-natural family ties. Beneath the cross, the bond of Christian fellowship is forming. Jesus could not offer the same role to his own brothers because they were not believers yet. Only John, the beloved disciple, was part of that connection. He would be the one to fulfill that Christian role. That must have been some comfort for both John and Mary in that moment, as “this disciple took her into his home.”

Conclusion

Yes, it’s a gruesome site, standing at the foot of the cross. Mary knows the meaning of true pain and sorrow. And she stands with us in ours. But just as Mary and John can stand together in Christian fellowship, so the same bond of Jesus’ love brings us together today. No matter what horrors or sufferings you face today, we can face them together in the power of Jesus’ sacrificial death for all of us. Give your life to Jesus and he will give you back so much more – the forming of a new bond, the bond of Christian fellowship.