

The Third Word: 'Woman, behold your son.' John 19:26-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and 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 his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son!" and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her to his own home'.

When I think about that scene at the cross on Good Friday, I always ask myself a few questions:
Why were the women there so faithful in spite of the dangers of being associated with Jesus?
What was Mary going through?
Why was John alone?
What was the common thread that kept them there at the cross until the end?

The Women 'Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there' (Mark 15:40)

According to various scriptures, these women knew Jesus well! Each and every one of them had a personal relationship with him and understood who he was. Knowing him had changed their lives and they were willing to follow him to provide whatever care was needed.

Most sources believe that Salome, wife of Zebedee, was Mary's sister. Her sons, James and John, were the third and fourth disciples called by Jesus. Their father Zebedee was thought to be a prosperous fisherman and culturally it would be assumed that his sons would follow in the family business. Salome believed that Jesus was the Messiah and, as that meant for her a great kingdom for the people of Israel, she wanted her sons to be part of it. In Matthew 20:21, we read that she asked Jesus, "Grant that one of these sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." As we all know, Jesus answered, "To sit at my right or my left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared for by my father." At this point in time, James, John and their mother didn't grasp what Jesus had been teaching about rewards and eternal life. In her book, *'God speaks to Women Today'*, Eugenia Price writes, "Salome was among those loyal women at the cross with Mary of Magdalene and his Mother. She believed in him and supported Him with her means and her spirit. At the foot of the cross, she believed in him with a changed heart, a heart opened to see that the greatest in his kingdom would always be the person with a servants' heart. She stood at the cross serving the only way she knew, with her love. She was there at His empty tomb, finding the real reward, but forgetting her old need for it".

Much has been written about Mary Magdalene. She is one of the most familiar heroines in scripture. Jesus cast out seven demons from her and her life was changed. In love and gratitude she served him faithfully to the end. Spangler and Syswerda write of Mary that "She thought she was living in heaven to be close to Jesus: to witness healing after healing: to be stirred, surprised and refreshed by his teaching. This indeed was joy to a woman unaccustomed to joy. And at the cross, she waited through the awful hours of agony, unable to look at the spectacle before her yet unable to turn away. Whatever his suffering she needed to be near him." Mary was the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection.

Jesus' mother, Mary: Mary was a young, innocent girl when Jesus was born, yet she was a woman of faith, obedient to God and his promises. Spoken to and guided by angels, Mary displayed a courage and strength of character well beyond her years. Jesus' birth, visits by shepherds and wise men with the blessings of angels would be a little more than most of us could handle at such a time in our lives. Eugenia Price writes in *God Speaks to Women Today*: "It is not surprising that we are never given any of Mary's actual words after she pondered these things in her heart. We are told that she kept them there. What else could she have done? Even if she had been educated, could her thoughts have been expressed? Birth itself is strange and holy enough. To have given birth to Life Himself locked her lips."

Again when the baby Jesus is brought to the Temple in Jerusalem to receive the Blessing of the Lord, he is recognized by Simeon and Anna, both old people who had spent their lives in the temple praying to the Lord. In Luke 2:34, we read 'Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce you own soul too"'.

Like any parent losing their child, Mary's pain must have been overwhelming! How can this be happening? Why me? Why this shameful, terrible, painful death? Isn't he the Son of God? How shocked and stressed she must have felt! And then the words of Simeon came back, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too".

Spangler and Syswerda write about Mary, 'She wanted to reach for him with all the might of her love, to bury his sorrow in her breasts, to tell him he was the son she needed most. All her life she had loved the God whose angel had spoken to her, calling her "highly favoured" But how could a woman whose son was dying on a Roman cross consider herself highly favoured? Suddenly her own words came back to her, as though a younger version of herself was whispering them in her ear: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said".'

John: Scripture is very clear that John was not only one of the earlier disciples called by Jesus but that he also loved Jesus very much and was much loved in return. John shows his love for Jesus in many ways throughout scripture, none more boldly than his place at the cross. What kept him there when the others fled in fear? John writes 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment' (1John 5:18). His faith in Jesus was so strong that all fear was wiped away. Jesus returned that love by bestowing on John the greatest gift of all – to care for his mother. Jesus knew that the heart of John was tender and full of love. He knew that John would welcome his mother into his home with love. He knew that John would be known in history as the disciple of love.

Those surrounding the Cross at that time didn't know about, or even contemplate, the resurrection. In faith, they stayed together in community doing what we do today, consoling and supporting one another when we mourn the loss of a loved one. In Hebrews 11:1, we read that "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." All those around the cross shared that faith, the common thread.

Thank you Lord for the Cross, that perfect gift of love that brings each of us to faith in You.

Isobel Napier: Good Friday 2008

References:

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