

The third word... "Woman, here is your son.... "

John 19 : 26,27... 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 into his home.

I will admit that I have pondered, prayed and meditated on these words uttered from the cross. Initially I was perplexed, perhaps I was missing something...the message seemed quite simple.

Jesus our Redeemer was also Jesus the son of Mary. His mother a widow and He an oldest son, His words within the Jewish law were His last will and testament. Jesus had no earthly goods and no home to leave Mary. As He suffered on the cross He was concerned for the daily care of Mary, but why bestow the responsibility to John? John a disciple when Jesus had His own half-brothers, Mary had other sons!

In John 7:5, we read "Not even His brothers believed on Him." In a passage taken from Evelyn and John Stagg's book titled *Woman in the World of Jesus* we read,

"... it was reported to Him, "our mother and your brothers stand outside, wishing to see you." Their motive or intention is not explained. The tradition is more interested in the far-reaching reply of Jesus : "My mother and my brothers are those hearing and doing the word of God" (Luke 8 :21)...In the radicality of this sweeping claim Jesus transcends all stereotype, all claims to advantage, even the ties of natural family as he affirms a new basis for family. Inclusion in His family has nothing to do with accidents of birth."

Perhaps Mary's own biological sons would not accept responsibility, perhaps it posed more risk than they were willing to take, after all she was the mother of the Son of God, King of the Jews...perhaps guilt by association was more than they were willing to bear.

Who was it then that stood at the foot of the cross with Mary? It was John the beloved disciple. Christ knew that Mary had no way to provide for herself and more importantly I believe He was providing a way for her to express her grief, a place where she would not be alone to mourn His death. Christ, though fully divine was also fully human, He understood the grief she would experience. We know from scripture that Mary was fully aware of the fate that awaited her son, and she had the knowledge and full expectation of His resurrection, however we are also aware of the foretelling of the 'piercing of her soul'! What a comfort in our own lives to have the confidence that Christ is with us in our own grief. Christ had confidence in John that he would be a comfort to Mary....such love and care that Jesus exercised as he suffered from the cross! As one writer I came across expressed... 'Not all the cross is cruelty and bitterness.'

And how did John respond? There would be a cost to taking Mary into his home – financial, emotional and again guilt by association. John did not stand and negotiate, he loved Christ and he fully accepted responsibility for Mary.

What can we take away from this? An anecdote from my own life...I remember a conversation I had with my father when I was in my early twenties, at the time I was living as a volunteer in a group home with teenaged girls. I was acutely aware of the advantages I had had in my life because of the sacrifices my father had made and decisions he made for my well-being. It overwhelmed me and I knew I would never be able to adequately express how grateful I was or repay him...this in essence was his response... “ What I have done is because I love you and want the best for you, I don't expect you to pay me back but I hope I have taught you to love others... ”

And so this is the simple message I hear from the cross...isn't Christ saying because I love you and care for you my hope is that you will love and care for those around you...just as He admonished Mary and John. Today we all stand at the foot of the cross, are we ready and willing to accept those whom Christ brings into our lives?