

**First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Lenten Luncheon March 13, 2012
Glory of God in the Words of Jesus from the Cross:
“Woman, here is your son...Here is your mother”**

Welcome

Hymn page 8

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”
(stanzas 1, 2 and 3)

Dennis

Prayer:

Leader: Jesus said, “Here is your son.. and.. “Here is your mother.”

Unison: As we hear these words of Jesus from the cross, help us, O God, to know his concern and compassion for us.

Leader: As we marvel at his concern for his mother in the midst of his own pain and suffering,

Unison: help us, O God, to be able to reach out beyond ourselves in concern for others, especially the members of our own families, for we ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Scripture Reading

John 19:25-27 (New Revised Standard Version)

Meanwhile, 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 (New International Version)

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ 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," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Lenten Meditation: Mary, the wife of Cleopas reflects on the Words of Jesus
“Here is your son... here is your mother”

I tried to keep her away. From all I heard crucifixions were not a pleasant sight and when you know the person they are treating so cruelly it just makes it even worse. I knew it would be hard for her to see her son being treated in his terrible way but there was no keeping her away. “I cannot let my son die alone,” she said, “I have to be there.”

Even though I knew it would be hard for her to see her son suffer in this terrible way I was in so many ways pleased that she would want to be there. I knew that she had not really appreciated all that he had been doing for the past few years since he had left home there in Nazareth. She had told me how on one occasion the reports had come back to them in Nazareth that because of his teaching, his preaching and his miracles some people had started to say that he was crazy and out of his mind. For his own good she and his brothers and sisters had gone to try to take him home to the quiet of Nazareth to see if he could get straightened out. When they got there they found a crowd of people around Jesus listening to his teaching. When someone told him that they were there and wanted to speak to him she said he had asked this strangest thing, “Who is my mother and my brothers?” They really began to realize then that he must be going crazy if he did not know who his mother and brothers were. “But then,” she said, “instead of looking at them he looked at all of the people he was teaching and he said, ‘Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” She had told me that when they heard him make such a comment it was all she could do to restrain his brothers from going and grabbing him and physically reminding him of who his brothers really were. After that incident, she had not had any contact with Jesus as he continued his ministry and had made his way to Jerusalem. I know that it must have been hard for her to hear his

comment that day and I can see why his brothers and sisters got upset with him, but somehow I felt that if she let him die alone and let that memory be her last memory of him she would be sorry. I was glad then when she said she was planning to be there. When I asked her who was going to be there with her I was sorry to hear that she was planning to go alone. Obviously his brothers and sisters still hated him so much they would not even show love and support for their mother by going with her even to see their own brother die this cruel death. There was just no way that I would let her go alone. Certainly that was not the place that I would choose to be, but if she was going I was determined I was going to go with her.

I was amazed at how strong she was. It was as if she was holding back her tears so that he would not get distressed about her in the midst of all of his own pain and suffering. In the midst of all the confusion and all the jeering from the soldiers and the people who had gathered there to see him die I was not sure whether Jesus was even aware that his mother was there. But then in a faint voice from the cross I heard him say, "Woman, here is your son." I thought he was talking about himself and asking her to look at him in the midst of all his pain and suffering but then I saw him turn his head towards John and to say to him, "Here is your mother." I was so pleased that she was there to hear him speak. His voice was weak but there was no malice or vengeance about it just love and pity. How it must have relieved her mind to know that he did not bear any grudges because she had misunderstood him and had not supported him in his teaching and his miracles. Maybe he knew that it would be hard for her go home and to tell his brothers and sisters what had happened to him and this is why he entrusted her to the care of his disciple, John. Just maybe he had been around him enough to know what was happening and could explain it to her and ease her mind. It sounded almost like his last will and testament to her.

I am so glad that I was there with her and could share these precious moments with her. It was so good even in the midst of all his pain and suffering to feel his love and compassion for her. Maybe even here in the midst of his own pain and suffering he was showing to her what I have been told he showed to so many in those years after he had left home in Nazareth. I have heard that his attention has always on other people and not on himself, and he had shown love and compassion even to those whom others wanted to despise and to reject. I had been told that he had said that “he had come to serve rather than to be served.” If ever there was a moment when he should have been trying to get all of the attention focused on himself and what people were doing to him it was then. Instead, though, he is more concerned for his mother than for himself. I certainly cannot claim to understand all that was going on but maybe even here as he was dying I saw something of that kingdom of God of which he spoke.

As we have heard these reflections from Mary, the wife of Cleopas, we may well want to ask, who is this? We read John’s account in two translations. (*see page 1*). How many women does John tell us were at the cross? The New Revised Standard Version seems to suggest 3 -- his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. The New International Version seems to suggest 4 -- his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Main question arises over the syntax in the Greek as to whether his mother’s sister is also the same person as Mary the wife of Cleopas or whether she is another person.

As we look at the listings in the other Gospels we do not necessarily get a clear answer.

Women at the Cross:

Matthew 27:55-56: *Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.* ⁵⁶ *Among them were Mary*

Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mark 15:40-41: *There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.*

Luke 23:49: *But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

Luke mentions only that there were some women who had followed him from Galilee. Matthew and Mark also mention the fact that the women had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Matthew identifies them as Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Mark says that there was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. All three gospels place Mary Magdalene at the cross.

John alone places Mary the mother of Jesus at the cross. But we cannot be certain who was there with her. Some scholars suggest that Mary, the wife of Cleopas was the sister of Mary by marriage and that Cleopas was the brother of Joseph. Since it is conjectured from silence that Joseph had died when Jesus was young, Cleopas may well have been providing support for his brother's family and therefore the two Marys, the mother of Jesus and the wife of Cleopas, had become close companions and friends so that it would be natural that she would want to be there at the cross with Mary. It is suggested by some of the same scholars that the Cleopas and his unnamed companion who are joined by the Risen Jesus on Easter evening as they walk home to Emmaus could well have been this same Cleopas, the uncle of Jesus, and his wife, Mary.

Others who have not seen this Mary of John's Gospel as the sister of Mary have argued that she is the Mary who is the mother of James and Joses mentioned in Matthew and Mark.

Another suggestion that has been made by scholars is that the sister of Mary that John mentions was a different person from the wife of Cleopas. Those who argue in this way suggest that this unnamed sister of Mary, the mother Jesus, in John's Gospel is the Salome of Mark's Gospel and the mother of the sons of Zebedee in Matthew's Gospel. This would make James and John cousins of Jesus which may well be why they are part of his inner circle along with Peter. If this is the case then in commending his mother to John he is entrusting her not just to one of her disciples but to his cousin. Although legally his brothers and sisters should have cared for their mother, now with the death of her first born child in entrusting her to John he is entrusting her to a family member who had a better chance to understand him than did his brothers and sisters at that time.

Whoever Mary, the wife of Cleopas, may have been the positive thing is that she is there with Mary at the cross. Her presence reminds us of how important the presence of another person with us, especially someone who loves us and wants to care for us, at a time of sorrow and crisis in our lives can be. We wonder how much Mary shared so much of our own hesitation to be there with people who are suffering, or who are struggling to make sense of what is going on especially in the face of death. So often our hesitation comes from our own struggles with the situation and our concern that we do not know what to say, or our feeling that we do not have the right answers about what is going on. As we think about Mary's struggle and her possible hesitancy to be there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the cross, it is interesting to reflect on what are the main things people have said to us when they have been going through the receiving line at the funeral home or

have visited with us in our homes at the time of a crisis. How many of us could recite what they said to us? Yet how many of us would remember the fact that they were there. If Mary, the mother of Jesus, is in any way like each one of us she would be far more likely to remember the fact that Mary was there with her than she would be to remember what she said to her.

The reflections of Mary, the wife of Cleopas, have reminded us of the way in which love will so often cause us to move out of own comfort zones to stand with other people in their time of need, as we go to be with people in their sorrow at the loss of loved ones, or as we visit with people in the nursing homes as depressing as such places might be to us, or we take the time to serve others through our food pantry, or as we reach out to people in various needs.

Today I would invite you to pause and to think who has been a Mary, the wife of Cleopas, in your life? Who has been there for you in your time of need as uncomfortable as it may have been for that person to be there? As you think of that person or persons I would invite you to thank God for what they have meant in your life. (Time of Silence)

I would now invite you to think about someone who needs for you to be a Mary, the wife of Cleopas for her or for him at the present time. As you think of that person I would invite to pray for her or for him and most of all to pray for God's guidance and strength to reach out in love to that person during this season of Lent. (Time of Silence)

Prayer:

Leader:

How lonely it would have been for your mother, Holy Jesus, if no one had been ready to stand beside her there at the cross as you suffered and died. We thank you for those who stood there with her. Most of all, we thank you that even in your

own pain and suffering you could reach out to her in her sorrow as she watched you die.

Unison:

Holy Jesus, as I see your concern for your mother, help me to see those about whom you would have me to be concerned. Help me to be able to reach out to them with your love. May my love and concern for those whom you make part of my life enable them to know that I am a Christian, one of your followers, for I ask these things in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Hymn page 5 “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” *Scholtes*
(Stanzas 1 and 2 and refrains)