

First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Sunday, March 11, 2012
Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Scripture Readings: Mark 3:21, 31-35

John 19:16c-27

Sermon Title; "The Glory of God in the Words of Jesus from the Cross:
Here is Your Son...Here is Your Mother"

Sermon Text: John 19: 26-27: When Jesus saw his mother and the
disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother,
"Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your
mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

How often do you play the "What..if" Game. What if I had just reached out
to her would she have committed suicide? What if I had taken the keys away and
refused to let that person drive when he was clearly drunk would there have been
the wreck and that person killed? What if I had not allowed her to go to that party
would she be a drug addict today? What if I had not encouraged him to take that
first drink of alcohol would he be an alcoholic today?

On times, of course, the "what..if" becomes even more personal. What if I
had been more serious about my studies would I have gotten that scholarship and
be able to attend that good school to which I always wanted to go. What if I had
taken that other job, married that other person, reached out to welcome that guest

at church, volunteered to help with that project, or what if my spouse had not died so young, or what if serious illness had not struck my family.

How much could all of us go on asking those “what..if” questions of our own lives or the lives of other people. As we think about our own experiences we have to wonder how much Mary was asking those “what..if” questions as she stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son, Jesus, die such a cruel death. What if she and his brothers and sisters had just done what they planned to do early in his ministry and had just taken him back home to the quiet of Nazareth would anything as cruel as this be happening to him? Next Sunday the adults in our Sunday School class in the parlor will be thinking about what, according to John’s Gospel, was the first miracle of Jesus when he turned the water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. As you hear that story again, look at the role that Mary played in encouraging and almost forcing Jesus to help out the embarrassed bridegroom on that occasion. According to John’s Gospel this is the last encounter between Jesus and his mother until she stands there at the cross watching him suffer this cruel form of death. As she watched him die we have to wonder how much she played that “what..if” game and thought, “what if I had not forced him to use his power to become known as a miracle worker is it possible that none of this would have happened to him?”

As we speculate on what Mary may have been thinking as she stood there at the cross and watched her son die, her experience reminds us that ultimately “what..if” can only be a game as far as the lives of other people are concerned. It can be a disastrous game and a very expensive game but ultimately we cannot make decisions for other people. Like Mary we can ask our “what..if” questions, and we can speculate and wonder on how different things might have been in the lives of other people but ultimately we cannot make their decisions for them. In the same way that Peter tried to stop Jesus going to Jerusalem and to suffer and to

die by telling him that he was crazy for talking in such a way, Mary could not make the decisions for Jesus. Part of what we have to affirm about the death of Jesus on the cross and his words before his death is that it is clear that his rejection, his suffering and his death did not come as a surprise to Jesus. As he entered Jerusalem and wept over the city he showed that he sincerely wished things would be different, but knowing the reality of the situation did not stop him setting his face to go to Jerusalem. In his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest he makes clear that he sees that what he is doing is the will of God.

We do not know when Jesus last saw his mother. All of the Gospels point to very little interaction between the two of them from the early days of his ministry until she is there standing at the foot of the cross. As clearly as Mark points out that his mother, his brothers and sisters did not understand his ministry and seemed to be in agreement with those who said, “He had gone out of his mind,” it would have been easy for Jesus simply to want to ignore the fact that she was there at the foot of his cross. But rather than playing the “what..if” game of not knowing whether she still did not understand him, he takes one of his last weak breaths to say to her, “Woman, here is your son.” The fact that there is no mention of any of his brothers or sisters there with her at the cross may indicate that they still were not ready to show any concern for him. In commending John to her as her son Jesus was entrusting her into the hands of one who may help her to come to appreciate who he was and what his ministry was all about even if he seemed at that moment like such a failure. As we see the concern that Jesus even in the midst of his own suffering showed for his mother, it is easy to pause and to play the “what..if” game. What if he had ignored her? What if he had felt that because she had misunderstood him early in his ministry and had not supported him he would have nothing to do with her, how would this make us feel? As we see him reach out in concern for his mother we can feel good not just for her, but also for

ourselves. The fact that he would show concern for her though she seems to have misunderstood him is our source of encouragement and of hope when we have not always understood Jesus and his ways, and have not always supported him by following his ways. The fact that he did not ignore and reject his mother is our assurance that as we reach out to him he will not ignore us or reject us, even when all of our choices and decisions have not been pleasing to him. As we hear him say to Mary, “Women, here is your son,” we are encouraged to feel the concern and the assurance that he sought to bring to her life. As our anthem has reminded us, God’s final answer to all of our decisions and choices is not rejection and condemnation but love and grace and mercy.

As we look at this scene, though, it is easy to want to continue to play the “what..if” game. What if there had been no one there to whom he could commend his mother? John alone of the Gospels says anything of any of the disciples of Jesus being there at the cross. What if Jesus could have looked around and could see no one to whom he could entrust the care of his mother how heartbroken he surely would have been. The fact that John was there and he could say to him, “Here is your mother,” must have been a source of encouragement to Jesus.

As we hear him commend his mother to John we are reminded of his words earlier when he had asked, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” and then looking at those around him had said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” As hard as it must have been for Mary and his brothers and his sisters to hear those words at that time Jesus was pointing out that the family of God is larger than biological relationships. Those family ties come out of a common desire to do the will of God.

What if there had been no one there at the cross to whom Jesus could have commended his mother? How hard it would have been for Jesus. But how hard is

it still when there is no one there to whom he can commend those today who are in need of comfort and support? Doing the will of God, being part of that family of God, means reflecting the love, the grace, the mercy, the compassion and the concern of God for all people, especially those who are in need. As we hear Jesus commend his mother to John we are prompted to think what if no one had been there for us when we needed comfort and support. How often do we take for granted and fail to appreciate those ties of Christian love that bind our hearts together of which we love to sing? As we see Jesus commend his mother to John, though, we have to ask what if we are not ready to be there for Jesus to commend those who need the comfort and encouragement and support that we can give them in their time of need?

Our affirmation of faith will remind us again that those ties that bind us together in Christian love mean that we are not alone but that Jesus wants to reach out to us with assurance and encouragement as he did to his mother when she had misunderstood him and had not always been ready to support him and to encourage his words and actions. It will also remind us that sharing those ties of Christian love as part of his family means hearing his call to be his church, to celebrate his presence and to reflect that presence as we reach out to love and to serve others. Before we sing again of those ties of Christian love that bind us together let us affirm our faith together using the words of the Creed of the United Church of Canada as printed in the back cover of our Presbyterian Hymnal.

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA CREED

We are not alone, we live in God's world.
We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
who has come in the true Man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by his Spirit. We trust him.

He calls us to be his church:
 to celebrate his presence,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
 our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.
 We are not alone.
 Thanks be to God.

CHURCH: UNIVERSAL

Blest Be the Tie That Binds

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DENNIS SM

John Fawcett, 1782

Johann Georg Nägeli (1773–1836)
 Arr. Lowell Mason, 1845

1. Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Chris-tian love;
 2. Be - fore our *Fa - ther's throne We pour our ar - dent prayers;
 3. We share our mu - tual woes, Our mu - tual bur - dens bear,
 4. From sor - row, toil, and pain, And sin we shall be free;

The fel - low - ship of kin - dred minds Is like to that a - bove.
 Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, Our com-forts and our cares.
 And of - ten for each oth - er flows The sym - pa - thiz-ing tear.
 And per - fect love and friend-ship reign Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

*Or "Maker's."