

LENT MID-WEEK 6

Text: John 19:23-27

March 24, 2021

Mary and John

We are nearing the end of our Lenten journey to the cross with Jesus.

The cross is looming before us.

Each step of the way brings us closer to the suffering and death of our Lord.

The Lenten journey is a sobering experience for us
because it calls upon us to reflect on the
purpose and meaning of our Lord's crucifixion.

What does it mean for us and for our lives
that Jesus accepted God's call
to walk the way of the cross?

To help us with our Lenten reflections,
we continue to focus our thoughts
on the faces around the cross.

As we look at the experiences and motives of those who were there,
we gain a better perspective of what the cross means for our lives,
in terms of forgiveness and grace,
and we gain a better understanding
of how the cross guides our lives
in terms of faithful discipleship.

Today, we are focusing on the faces of Mary and John
as they stand arm in arm
at the foot of the cross.

The day Jesus was crucified
had to be the most awful day
of their lives.

There he was on the cross—not some criminal, not some insurrectionist,
not some wild-eyed radical or stranger they hardly knew—
but Jesus—Mary's own flesh and blood and John's dearest friend.

Who among us could imagine the intense and bitter feelings
Mary and John bore in their hearts
as they watched Jesus suffer and die!

Their grief must have been unbearable as they watched him suffer while showing great compassion for the blood-thirsty crowd that gathered around the cross for the spectacle of his death. And how much more that sorrow must have welled-up in their hearts as he turned to them and said,

Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother.

Even as he died, Jesus showed compassion and loving concern for the crowd that cried out for his death. How deeply the grief must have cut into their hearts.

To such compassionate love, there could be only one response for Mary and John. From that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Throughout their lives, Mary and John had been extremely close to Jesus. They had shared many experiences with him that had filled their lives with great love and joy.

Mary, of course, was the mother of our Lord.

She had watched in wonder and love as her son grew in stature and wisdom.

She had pondered in her heart the meaning of all the strange events that surrounded his birth and motivated his ministry.

She remembered the time when Jesus was 12 years old and had wandered away from his family and stayed behind in Jerusalem astounding all the great scholars in the Temple with his profound wisdom.

And she was there for his first miracle at the wedding at Cana where he turned the water into wine.

No one in the whole world loved Jesus more than Mary; her love for Jesus was the dear love of a mother for her son.

And John was his closest friend...sharing many important experiences with Jesus from the great catch of fish...to the mountaintop of the Transfiguration... from the feeding of the 5,000...to the events of the Last Supper.

John was one of the first to answer the call to be a disciple,

and when Jesus invited him to become a part of his group,
 it didn't take John long to cast aside his nets and walk away with Jesus.
 That was the beginning of a very special relationship.
 Of all the disciples, John alone
 is the one known as the beloved disciple.

And now Mary and John—mother and beloved disciple—
 stood together at the foot of the cross
 watching in disbelief as their beloved Jesus was crucified.

There was a special bond that drew the three of them together—a bond of love—
 Jesus' love for them and their love for Jesus—
 a bond of love that transcended life itself.

Jesus was dying, but his love was alive in them.

His love would live on in the love he gave them to share with one another.

Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother.

The power of love
 is a great and mysterious force
 that has the capability of
 transforming lives.

Broken down people who have the good fortune of being blessed
 by the sincere love of someone who really cares for them
 can be radically transformed into a whole new person that is full of life.

One of the great love stories of all time
 that witnesses to the power of love to dramatically transform a person's life
 was the relationship between Helen Keller
 and her devoted teacher, Ann Sullivan.

Helen, as you may recall, was an impossible child.

Deaf and blind from birth, she was cut off from the world around her.

She lived totally isolated in a world of silence and darkness.

At one point in Helen's life,

her parents were so hopelessly frustrated with their inability to reach her
 they were ready to put her away in a mental institution.

But through the persistent, loving efforts of her teacher, Ann Sullivan,
 Helen Keller became one of the prominent women
 in the field of American literature.

The power of Ann Sullivan's love and devotion
 transformed Helen Keller from a beast of a child
 into a great and gracious human being.

Such is the love of Christ for us all.

His love is a love that has deep compassion and concern
for each and every one of us.

His love is a love that binds us together
into a community of concern
for the well-being of one another.

When Christ calls us to be a part of his body, to be a part of his church,
he doesn't call us to live out our lives in a vacuum;
he calls us into a close fellowship of believers

to share his love with one another—
caring for each other so that we can grow together
in our faith and understanding of God's love for us.

In the midst of life, when we hurt from experiences that break our hearts,
Christ has given us to one another to be pillars of strength
that we might share his love and learn and grow through our experiences together.

I have seen that love at work in our church
as you have reached out to one another
in times of grief, sorrow and difficulty.

And I have experienced that love from the community of faith
when my life has been overwhelmed
by the burdens that were weighing me down.

I remember the support my family and I received almost 12 years ago
during an extremely difficult time
for Lynne and me.

It was Holy Week 2009—the week before Easter.

On Monday Lynne's father and my mother both entered Hospice units—
Lynne's Dad in Ft. Walton Beach and my Mom in Jacksonville.

On Wednesday, I left to see my Mom and take Beth to see Lynne's Dad.
While we were with my Mom that night
Lynne called us to tell us her father had died.

On Thursday morning, Beth and I left to drive to Valparaiso
to be with Lynne and her mother
and share some time together.

The next morning, Good Friday, I drove back to Jacksonville to be with my Mom.
I went to her room and talked with my brother and sister before they left.
About an hour later, I called to tell them Mom had just died.

I knew I didn't have to get back for Easter services
—I knew the people of Apostles would understand and be supportive of me—
but there really was no place else I wanted to be that Easter.
And that was one of the best decisions I ever made.
The love—the hugs and tears of condolence—was precisely the love
Jesus gave to Mary and John—and to you and me—to share.

Like Mary and John, you and I are not left alone in our times of grief.
Christ has given us one another—
this communion of saints, this fellowship of believers—
to share one another's burdens and uplift one another's spirits.
Through this sharing of Christ's love, uplifting one another in our times of grief,
we can experience the blessing of Christian community
and the joy and hope of Easter faith.

As we look at the faces of Mary and John
and see them standing arm in arm
at the foot of the cross,
we hear Jesus' words anew saying to us,
***My beloved,
behold your brothers and sisters.***