

## The Third Word From The Cross.

Text: John 19:25-27

Suggested Hymns:

82 pt. 3, 71, 171, 51, 79

- 1) Mary, the mother of Jesus at the Cross
- 2) John at the Cross
- 3) The Third Word from the Cross
- 4) The 4th Commandment

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Third Word from the Cross, John 19:25–27, <sup>25</sup> *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.* <sup>26</sup> *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!"* <sup>27</sup> *Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Again we are standing in spirit under the cross on Calvary's hill. Slowly the hours are passing away, and in consequence the multitude that had gathered there either from curiosity, to gaze upon the gruesome scene, or from hatred, like the chief priests and elders, had gradually begun to disperse.

The departure of Christ's enemies marked the approach of His friends, the faithful few who remained constant to the end. At first, the evangelist informs us that the little group had stood at a distance, anxiously noting all that was going on. They now draw nearer, until they are within sight of the Sufferer, within the sound of His voice. Who, we question, are they?

Today let us consider who they were and the Third Word from the cross. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Mary At The Cross

First and chiefly our attention is riveted upon the person first mentioned: *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother."* We do not see much of

Mary in the Scriptures. We see her in that moment of happiness and wonder when the birth of Christ was announced to her by the angel Gabriel. We saw her with the divine Child in the manger at Bethlehem.

We perceive her in the Temple at the presentation when aged Simeon told her that because of this Son a sword would pierce her soul, and then fleeing with her husband and the precious Child to Egypt and returning to Nazareth.

We hear of her again when in the Temple, after a search of three days, she finds her twelve-year-old Boy seated among the doctors, astonishing them with His questions and answers.

Then for eighteen years we have no record till we see them both at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, when, having entered upon His public ministry, upon her urging that He should help the newly wedded, He administered a mild rebuke.

After that, till we come to the incident recorded in our text, there is no record of any communication between them, except certain hints that she met Him off and on in His journeying.

But when Jesus is hanging upon the cross, she is there. We read in the twenty-first chapter of Genesis that, when Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, saw her son fainting with thirst in the wilderness, she placed him under one of the shrubs, while she went and sat a good way off and said to herself, ***“Let me not see the death of the child.”***<sup>1</sup>

Not so the mother of our Lord. She did not separate herself from the Child of her bosom in His deepest agony. As we heard, when, at the time of her purification, she had brought Him to the Temple, aged Simeon had spoken words which, though then not understood, she had never forgotten: ***“a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”***<sup>2</sup>

Here was the fulfilment. That sword was cutting its way, harrowingly and unsparingly, deep into the innermost parts of her soul. It is always hard for a parent to see a child die. Only those whose affliction it has been to sit at the couch of their beloved offspring and to watch with anxious hearts and tearful eyes the stream of life slowly ebbing away and to close their eyes in death, know the agony of it.

Far worse, however, was the agony of this mother, whose Son was dying the death of a criminal, and an outcast. There He hung before her eyes. His wounds were bleeding, but she dared not touch them. His lips were parched and dry, but she dared not moisten them.

The nails that pierced His hands and feet pierced her soul. The crown of thorns around His brow were a circle of torture around her heart. The taunts flung at Him wounded her likewise.

*Not only this. Had not the angel told her before His birth: “<sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end?”<sup>3</sup>*

This greatness, this throne, this kingdom, where were they? When in the village shop in Nazareth He had cast down His tools and, bidding her farewell, He went forth upon His ministry.

When the news arrived of the words of grace and power He was speaking to vast multitudes, of the miracles which He was performing, such as the world had never seen or heard of before, she was confident that what had been told her by the angel would come to pass.

But then followed other news of reaction, opposition, and persecution. Her heart sank within her. She could not stay where she was. She left Nazareth and went away trembling to see what had happened.

And now she stands at the foot of the cross. Where is the greatness, the glory, the kingdom? Was that prediction of the angel a deception? We know the explanation. The cross was the only road to it. And before many weeks Mary, too, understood it. But try to imagine what must have been the emotion of her heart in these dismal moments.

One of the grandest hymns that have come down to us from the Middle Ages is the hymn known by the opening words of *Stabat Mater*, which has been set to music by some of the greatest masters.

Beside the cross in tears  
The woeful mother stood,  
Bent ‘neath the weight of years,

And viewed His flowing blood;  
Her mind with grief was torn,  
Her strength was ebbing fast,  
And through her heart forlorn  
The sword of anguish passed.

## **2. John At The Cross**

However, there is one other person whom we must distinguish in that little group. Looking once more, we discern that disciple whose amiable disposition had won the special affection of his Master. John who had leaned on Jesus' bosom at the Passover Supper, who had been an eye-witness of His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane was determined to be with Him also in His closing moments.

He doubtless was included with the rest of the disciples in the sad statement that they all would forsake their Master and flee. But his panic would have lasted only a moment. He was present at the very commencement of the trial, and he is present now, the only one of the Twelve.

Perhaps his acquaintance with the high priest, which allowed him to get into the palace where the trial took place, may still have operated in his favour. But it was most of all his devotion that brought him to his Master's side. And he had his reward, for he was permitted to render a last service for Jesus amid His agony and received from Him a token of confidence, an unspeakable privilege and honour. What was it?

Our Lord at that time was steeped in the agony of unutterable pains of suffering, an extremity of pain which might have made Him insensible to everything beyond Himself.

Christ, we know, had a world of interests to attend to. He was then offering the great sacrifice for the redemption of all mankind. He was engaged in the final wrestle with the mighty problem which He alone could solve.

## **3. The Third Word From The Cross**

The first word of Jesus on behalf of His enemies is a wonder of mercy. Yet it may be said to have been part of His office to intercede for sinners. His address to the penitent thief was also altogether in harmony with His work as the

Saviour. But what a moral is this, that in such an hour He had composure and took time to attend to a domestic detail of life!

Often men who have been engaged in charitable work have been unmindful of the claims of their own families, and they have excused themselves, or excuses have been made for them, on the ground that the public interest predominated over the needs of those nearer to them.

Now and then Jesus Himself spoke as though He took this view. He would not allow His plans to be interfered with even by His mother. But now He showed that, although He refused her hasty interference at Cana, never for one moment did He forget that He was Mary's Son.

He bore an undying affection to the woman who had thirty-three years before clasped Him to her bosom, had watched over His slumbers when as a Babe He nestled in the stable at Bethlehem, and had exercised painstaking guardianship over His developing youth in Nazareth.

Jesus had never forgotten her just claims and her true interest, and as He now, expiring, thinks of her future, the solitude that awaited her declining years, thinks of her as a bereaved, helpless widow, He makes suitable and dutiful provision for her.

The words Jesus spoke were indeed few, — for every word He uttered in that position was spoken in great pain, — but they completely covered the case. To His mother He said: "**Woman, behold your son!**" indicating John with His eyes. And to the disciple He merely said: "**Behold your mother!**" Simple, yet comprehensive. Plain, almost a command, yet overflowing with love to both Mary and John.

The question has been asked, Why was John chosen by Christ to care for His mother? Why did she not go to the home of one of her other sons? For we may accept the interpretation that she had other sons. However, they did not believe in Jesus as we learn from John 7:5.

Was John more comfortably situated than they? We cannot say. There are indications in the gospels that John was living in more comfortable circumstances than the rest of the apostles; and this consideration may have weighed with Jesus. He would not send His mother where she would feel that she was a burden.

It is highly probable also that St. John was unmarried. But no doubt there were deeper reasons. There was no arm on which His mother could lean so confidently as that of John who had leaned on her Son's breast.

John and Mary were kindred spirits: John was a man of deep sympathy, delicate sentiments and emotions. Mary was, as far as can be ascertained from Scripture, was the most tender, humble, patient, and loving of women. Both were similar spirits, just as they were one in their intense affection for Jesus.

And how did the apostle to whom this Third Word on the Cross was addressed follow the command? The account reads: "*And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*"

Many have understood this to mean that he, at once, gently withdrew her from the spot that she should not be agitated by seeing the death-throes of her Son, though he himself, John, immediately returned to Calvary.

As to the mother's future, tradition varies. The report commonly accepted is that she died at an advanced age, some eleven or twelve years after the crucifixion scene, during which time John refused to leave the city, even for the purpose of preaching the Gospel. Only after her death did he depart on his missionary travels.

The blessings of God manifestly rested upon him for thus sheltering the care committed to him. It is certainly significant that all the apostles faced the terrors of martyrdom. All met death in some form or other of torture and cruelty except John. He alone was spared those gruesome horrors.

John lived to a mature old age and died a natural death in the city of Ephesus. What a most telling verification of that promise which attaches to the Fourth Commandment: "*that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth!*"<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. The Fourth Commandment**

From the one or two lessons to be gathered from this touching scene, this is the outstanding one. Jesus from the pulpit of His cross preaches to all ages a sermon on the Fourth Commandment.

What nature, sound reason, and the still higher authority of God's voice on Mount Sinai teaches, that Jesus adds His blessed example to on the cross.

Little do children know how much they owe to their parents, especially to her who at the hazard of her own life gave them life; and then the anxious days, the sleepless nights, the self-denials, the untiring, self-sacrificing love which has gone out to them and which no time, no change, no ingratitude, is able to wear out.

Of all friendships, of all ties, ever formed later on in life, there is none so pure, so unselfish, as is the friendship and the love that hovered over us at our birth, when we could not yet return the token of affection which was pressed upon our cheek by our mother.

And it is pitiful to see children forsake and neglect their parents, especially in their declining years, when their infirmities require their thoughtfulness and care. Such ingratitude and heartless conduct cannot but invite the punishment of a just and holy God, even as we heard that the opposite, in the case of St. John, invites God's blessing.

May our Lord's example deeply and indelibly impress itself on the hearts of our youth, so that they may always cherish in dutiful affection and respect their parents and not cease to provide for them cheerfully when the shadow of life's evening with its weaknesses falls upon them.

And as on the cross Jesus thought first of all of the need of His mother, so He still has concern for the needs of those who are His, and He says to His disciples: Behold, take care of them. ***“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”***<sup>5</sup>

Let us be kind and provident towards all who have been widowed, the destitute and infirm, do all that is in our power for the noble institutions, homes, asylums, that are maintained by Christian charity.

Concluding, we cannot but once more call attention to the situation, the place occupied by that little group. We read: ***“<sup>25</sup> Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene ... and the disciple whom He loved.***

That is the position we are now occupying in this holy season of Lent and which I ask you always to occupy. It is the most enlightening and blessed place under heaven.

The hymnist wrote:<sup>6</sup>

All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.

Could you know the evil, the vile nature, and the evil effects of sin? Above all, Could you know who hangs suspended yonder? Who is He? And what has He done for you? What do you owe Him?

Considering this, take your stand on that little hill outside of Jerusalem's gates.

The hymnist continued,

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,  
By the cross are sanctified;  
Peace is there that knows no measure,  
Joys that through all time abide.

Those who originally stood there found that joy. May God grant that we also find it! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 21:16

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:35

<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:33

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 6:3

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>6</sup> Hymn 171