

Words of Life from the Cross: The Loving Word

A sermon based on John 19:26,27.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When is the greatest time to preach a sermon? Seems like an odd question. You're thinking, "Maybe right now? 11am?" Well, ask any WELS pastor, and more often than not, the answer you'll probably hear is, "At a funeral." Some of the best sermons I've gotten to preach (and even hear) have been funeral sermons...and it's not because they're somehow more insightful or I somehow reach another gear and become so eloquent in my delivery. Sometimes...it's quite the opposite.

It's because of you...or rather, because of the audience. How would you describe the typical funeral audience? Mourning, full of grief, maybe angry, searching for answers. Whatever it is, it's often a captive audience, one primed by tragedy, hearts aching and ready to hear some good news. And I have it. And I get to share it, to heal a hurting family.

Well, if you think about it, every word Jesus spoke on the cross could be considered a funeral sermon, and today, we see he had an audience mourning, hearts filled with grief, ready to hear good news. And even though it was only an audience of two, he had a loving word to speak. And here it is, "**Woman, here is your sin...Here is your mother.**"

Really, Pastor, that's his funeral sermon? I mean, here you have this mother, Mary, who yes, her son is Jesus, the Son of God. Yes, she knew (and had to be reminded at times) there was something different about him. But put yourself into her shoes. Her son's not dead, but he's dying. No mother ever expects to see that. No parents wants that. Children are supposed to bury their mothers, not mothers their children. When Jesus was only a few days old, Simeon had told Mary a sword would pierce her own soul too. Did she realize now time what those prophetic words meant? Did she understand it was happening right now? How it must have grieved the mother of our Lord to see her Son dying on the cross! What mother could bear such a sight?

And there was John, His best friend. Who could bear to watch his best friend die such a horrible death? Could you? John, who had leaned on Jesus the night before at the Passover table, now stares up at the scene against the blackened sky. It was all so confusing. This was not the way it was supposed to go. They had ridden into Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!" and the waving of palms. Jesus had entered the city like the King He was. It was His moment; the crowds were with Him. And now it all comes down to this. Here Jesus is broken, beaten, bleeding, dying. John's heart, too, must have been broken, standing there utterly helpless to help his best friend.

And then there's Jesus, hanging there. We'd expect he should only be focused on his own pain and suffering. But we know better. The soldiers nailing him to the cross, the thief who wanted nothing more than to be remembered, and now, his mom and the disciple whom he loved...it's no surprise he turns his focus to them and speaks a loving word, "**Woman, here is your son...here is your mother.**"

But again, how was that a funeral sermon for them? Mary and John went home, yes, having the comfort and support of each other, but a son, a friend, a teacher, the Messiah was dying...soon would be dead. Where's the good news in that? Where was the comfort in that?

Despite what Mary and John both must have felt in that moment and as they left that mount, the good news and comfort is in what we see hanging on the cross and what he displays from this word of life. It's love...or, to use another word we highlighted in our Wednesday evening worship a couple of weeks ago, we see compassion, don't we? Compassion is sympathizing, having concern for the sufferings of others.

Jesus knew what his mother and John were going through at that moment. He knew what they would need, physically, after he was gone...especially for Mary, that she would need someone to take care of her, provide for her. As the oldest son, he couldn't do that anymore, so, **"Woman, here is your son."** Love...compassion.

Try to put yourself in Jesus' shoes. Is that where your mind would have been at? I mean, yes, we put together wills to ensure our loved ones will be taken care of after we're gone. But to be in the moment of intense pain and suffering, what would you be thinking about? When troubles come into your life, what do you think about?

You know how the saying goes, "Blood runs thicker than water." In today's world, that means family relationships are more important than friends or anyone else. In other words, family comes first.

Now, I'm not going to deny the incredible blessing family is...they're one of the greatest gifts from God...people who love you, who support you, who are there in troubling times. But, family can also be one of the tools, instruments, weapons Satan stashes in his arsenal. Can you think of some ways he uses them? Or another way to think about it, what happens when family is pit against God, against church, against your faith in Jesus? How does Satan use family to try to separate you from Jesus?

Family comes into town for a visit. Sunday morning comes around and...let's do brunch! And the opportunity passes by to show how worship is not a convenience but what you need for your life and your faith in Jesus.

Summer's coming up, which inevitably means your kids will be interested in every summer activity under the sun. It also means your wallet takes a huge hit, which trickles down to the offerings you give to God. And I know you're well-aware of the time commitments and the potential temptations there, too.

Unfortunately, not everyone in your family belongs to this church or even to a church. What happens, then, when differences of opinion occur...when what the church says, or here, really, what God's Word says, doesn't agree with their thoughts, their beliefs, their wants? Do you keep in mind Jesus' words, **"Anyone who loves his/her father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his/her son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his/her cross and follow me is not worthy of me"**? Or, does the mantra, "Happy wife, happy life" (of course, applied to whichever family member) take over and win out?

Or, even just the way you think about the needs of your family versus the needs of your church family. What wouldn't we...how far wouldn't we go for family? But when someone here is hurting or in need, what do you do? I know what I'm tempted to do (and what I've sometimes done, unfortunately), "That's not my problem."

Could you imagine if that had been Jesus? “Well, I’m about to die...and she’s just my earthly mother...and they don’t really understand what this is all about anyways...so, that’s on them.”

We can’t imagine that...because that’s not Jesus. And that shouldn’t be us either. But friends, family, it’s too easy to get caught up in our own lives...to think only about ourselves. It’s too easy to let family get in the way of Jesus. It’s too easy not to show love and compassion. It’s also too unfortunate and sinful.

Thank God, then, that blood does run thicker than water! Family ties are strong. Jesus’ love and compassion for us, his family, runs even stronger. One time, Mary and Jesus’ family wanted to take Him into protective custody, fearing He had lost His mind, as he continued to preach, knowing how much the Jewish religious leaders hated him and wanted that “problem” to be gone. As he was preaching, his disciples told Him, **“Your mother and brothers are here for you.”** Jesus looked at the people gathered in a circle around Him and said, **“Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

You know, Jesus certainly showed his love for his mother and John here, that he cared about family, wanting his mother to be provided for. But friends, his words here only underscore the even greater love Jesus has for us, his family.

Think about that. We’re family. That goes against how everything should be, right? With our sinful nature, with the sinful lives we live, we show ourselves to be his enemies. And Jesus ought to look at us and say, “That’s on you.” But we hear Jesus say, **“Greater love has no one than this...that he lay down his life for his friends.”** But we’re not even just friends. No, **“whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

And here’s how we got to that point...“blood runs thicker than water.” Jesus’ blood runs thicker than any amount of sin we could ever commit. We see that there on the cross. How did John, the same John here, later (much later) describe that moment at Calvary and especially that blood of Jesus? In 1 John, **“The blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin,”** and then, **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us (shown in Jesus – his life, his death, his resurrection), that we should be called children of God!”** Brothers and sisters of Christ, made that way through his blood, shed on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins...part of the family of God, made that way through his love and his compassion.

Blood runs thicker than water. Again, family ties are strong. But now, the waters of baptism run even thicker than blood, for baptism binds us together and connects us as one in the Body of Christ...as family. You see, the bonds of blood end with death. Husband and wife are united as “one flesh” until death parts them. But our unity in the body of Christ goes beyond death and the grave and on to resurrection and eternal life. Look around you and behold your brother, your sister, your family. Jesus bought us with his blood. By the waters of baptism, he gives us to one another, as members of his family.

And I’m thankful for that. I’m thankful for you. Jesus has put you into my life, to be the support, to comfort me in the hard, stressful times, to join in rejoicing in the successes. But even more than that, I’m thankful for your faith in Jesus...the encouragement against temptation, the forgiveness freely given in times of sin, the support to stand together against the assaults of Satan. I’m thankful for family.

And, as family, here's John's encouragement to us, ***"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"*** (1 John 4:7-11). That's God's family.

A couple years back, I shared the story of a young family, whose daughter had died, how at the funeral, the dad got up and through tears talked about what joy there was in being able to help usher his daughter home into Jesus' everlasting arms.

I don't know that Mary and John had that same joy...that they saw the incredible blessing of family...then. But Jesus did. And he spoke words of love to them....a powerful funeral sermon. A message about family. Jesus provided for family. By his blood, through the waters of baptism, in love, Jesus has provided for this family. He's made us family...to live as family, to love this family, finally, to find joy in ushering family home to Jesus' everlasting arms. Amen!

We pray...**May we all Your loved ones be, all one holy family, loving, since Your love we see: Hear us, holy Jesus. Amen.**