

John 19:26-27 “Woman, here is your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother!”

Unless Jesus comes again between now and the last Day...your day, my day, our *transition* day from this time of grace to the glory that awaits...is coming. For any of us, that day could be today, it could be tomorrow, it could be years in the future, all according to God's timetable. And while we all get the concept, yet most of us are reluctant to talk about it. In fact, a survey by Independent Age discovered that 1/3 of people ages 40-64 would rather talk about their weight than talk about death, their own or their parents'.ⁱ

But I'm going to ask you to give your own death some thought this afternoon. If you could script it, just the way you want it, what would it look like? Where would you be? How would it go? Who would be there? What would be important to you at such a time?

While I am sure that there are a lot of similarities AND a lot of differences between our collective imaginings this afternoon, there is decidedly one commonality between all of us: none of us would want a death day like Jesus. The sky had gone dark. He was surrounded by mocking crowds, vicious soldiers, and few friends. His body was wracked by pain. His heart was weighted by sin. His soul abandoned by his Father.

And yet, in the words he spoke from the cross, you can find a miraculous connection between his death and yours. As he forgives your sin, as he offers you paradise, as he displays his humanity for you even as he commands his divinity for you...like the blood dripping from his head and hands and feet, his love drips down to you and me.

Just look at the love he has for Mary ***when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby.*** Considering all that was going on around

him, and all that was being done to him, and all that was being taken from him, could you have found the love in your heart to be concerned for others?

I was privileged once to have a heartfelt conversation with an 11 year old young lady. She had an incurable condition that would likely lead to her death before her 16th birthday. In fact, less than three years later she was to be welcomed face-to-face in the loving embrace of her dear Savior. But as we sat in my office that day, she was struggling with the whole idea of her mortality and impending death. She came with her mom, and we talked awhile. But then she asked if her mom could step out of the room for a bit so that she and I could talk alone. To this day, I cannot begin to appreciate how hard it must have been both for her and for her mom at that moment. For her to have the courage to ask. And for her mom to step away for those few minutes when it was so obvious that her daughter was struggling.

At her request, those few minutes together remained private between the daughter and me until after that young lady went to be with her Lord. At that time I was able to share with her family just what weighed on her heart and mind. You see, in spite of all the challenges that the little girl faced, what concerned her most about her death was not death. It was not dying. It was not pain. It was not fear of the unknown. For her, her greatest concern, was how hard it was going to be on her family.

And it is hard on families, isn't it? Just think of Mary, suffering in her own way at the foot of the cross. How the words of Simeon in the temple, some 33 years earlier, would have come back to her with frightful accuracy, ***“And a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”*** (Luke 2) It would have been bad enough to see your child suffer, bleed, cry out. But to know that to stop it, even if she could, would doom the world to eternal destruction; to know that this was God's plan; to know that you, in your sinfulness, had put him there on the cross.

And yet, when he sees her, there is no look of regret, no look of superiority, no accusation. No, just the look of love it

dripped down to her, covering her in his caring concern for her *earthly well-being*, even as he is guaranteeing hers, and yours, and my *eternal living*. As only Jesus can do, he looks through and past himself – past the pain, the suffering, the heartache, the abandonment – to seek and find Mary, mindful of her needs. **Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son!”²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother!”**

We can't say for sure which of the disciples were there that day. There are some indicators that they may have been among the many people who followed Jesus out to the Place of the Skull. The only disciple specifically mentioned is John, and even then, as he often referred to himself, not by name, but by the love that John received from his Savior.

Conspicuous by their absence, however, is any mention of Jesus brothers and sisters. You may recall, that while they would have described Jesus as having a Messiah complex, indeed they had publicly described him as **out of his mind** (Mark 3:21), they certainly, at least at this time, did not see him as the promised Messiah.

While that would later change (his brother James becoming not only a believer, but a champion and martyr of the faith), at this point, one can only imagine the strained relationship between Mary, the mother devoted to her eldest Son, and all of the other children, who thought he was nuts.

This probably explains why there would have been no blood relation to provide for her, support her, encourage her. Not only did Mary see Jesus as her son, she also saw him as her Savior. We can see the distinction in Jesus' words as he tenderly reminds Mary, the **woman**, of his role and mission. And yet, as her son, he looks to her and her needs. Knowing his own time to do so was coming to an end, Jesus provided for her by connecting her with the welcoming hands of John. **And from that time this disciple took her into his own home.**

Isn't that a beautiful picture of what Jesus does for you and me? Those words of love, as sure in their brevity as they were sure in their sufficiency, continue to speak to you and me. He does what he needs to do to make sure that you and I have what we need, are supported each day, and is connecting us again and again with the hands of our Heavenly Father who welcomes us into his home **from this time** on, even forever. No, on this Friday we call Good, Jesus wasn't thinking about himself – his own relief, his own comfort, his own innocence. No, he was thinking only of others, of us, of you.

Tradition tells us that John welcomed Mary, first into the family home in Jerusalem, and then, took her with him on his gospel journeys. It is said that she died some years later and was buried in Ephesus where John served as the Bishop of Asia Minor until his own death. What is accurate and true about tradition, finally, isn't the point. The point is that John honored his Savior's familial will and testament, welcoming Mary into his home as if she were his own mother. In so doing, John was guarding and keeping the word of Jesus.

May we, too, as we gaze into his loving eyes, as we hear his precious word, as we receive it with thanksgiving, may we also guard and keep it, honoring him for all that he has done, loving others as he has loved us, and anticipating our own welcome into his heavenly home.

The introductory notes to this service include a dialogue between the Soul and Jesus. The words are the opening stanzas to Hymn #126. The concluding stanzas from that same hymn:

*What can I for such love divine
To you, Lord Jesus, render?
No merit has this heart of mine;
Yet while I live I'll tender
Myself alone And all I own
In love to serve before you.
Then when time's past, Take me at last;
In heav'n I shall adore you. Amen.*

ⁱ <https://www.independentage.org/we-need-to-talk-about-death/talking-about-death/why-you-should-never-be-too-polite-to-talk-about-death>