

SI: Easter is five Sundays away.

We're preparing for the celebration of our Lord's resurrection,
by looking at a special portion of the Gospels.

We're meditating on the words Jesus spoke as he was dying on the cross.

These are often called the Seven Last Words or the Seven Words of the Cross,
because Jesus spoke seven times.

Each of the four Gospel writers contributed details about the crucifixion
that are not found in the other three Gospels.

So all of Jesus' seven words are not found in any one Gospel.

You have to read them together to arrive at a chronology.

So we turn this morning to John's Gospel,
and Jesus' third word from the cross.

INTRO: I've mentioned before an interesting carving out at St. Bernard Abby.

There is a large limestone lintel over a door going into the chapel.

On it is a picture of a boat in waves, with some men in it, one of them standing up.

It's a picture of the miracle of Jesus calming the storm.

Over the picture are the Latin words *ecclesia sancta*. Holy Church.

Reason it says holy church is because early Christians read that miracle and saw the boat as a symbol of the church. We're the disciples of Jesus, all together sailing through the storms of life and Jesus is in the boat with us.

If you ever see old stained glass window with a boat in it—

it's not Noah's Ark, it's a symbol of the church.

There are lots of symbols for the church, lots of word pictures in the Bible:

A building or temple built of living stones

A body with different parts and Christ is the head

An army with Christ as the captain

A flock of sheep, we're the sheep, Jesus is the good shepherd

A bride adorned in white linen, prepared for her husband

A vineyard, I am the vine, you are the branches

An olive tree—Paul's famous picture of Gentiles being grafted into Israel.

Each of those word pictures is worth studying.

They give us a different understanding of who we are as the people of God.

There is a word picture for the church in the third word of Jesus from the cross.

Family. The church is the family of God. It's the household of faith.

When Jesus spoke this word, there was a little group gathered around the cross.

His mother Mary was there along with several other woman.

And the disciple John was there standing beside them.

Jesus was exhausted and dying so his words were few but full of meaning.

He looked Mary, caught her eye, and said "Woman. Look. Your son."

As he said, "Your son" he must have looked at or in some way indicated John.

Then, he caught John's eye, and said, "Look. Your mother."

In a few word Jesus ended something and started something.

He severed his earthly relationship with his mother,

and he established a new mother/son relationship between John and Mary.

And in that severing and establishing, Jesus was teaching us something

about the church, which is the family of God.

The family of God is made up of people who are related not by natural blood,

but related by the blood of Christ, shed on the cross to save them.
By faith in Jesus you become a part of this family.

There is a secure place for every believer in the family of God.

No one who comes to Jesus will be left out of this family.

And in this family, like every good family, there are privileges and responsibilities.

Each of Jesus' words from the cross reveal his heart, they show us who Jesus is
as our Savior and what he had to do in order to save us.

Each of his words from the cross also probe us with very piercing questions.

Do you see the church as the family of God?

And are you living as if the church really is your spiritual family?

Going to look at Christ 3rd word of the cross under three headings:

1. How Jesus sees the church
2. How American Christians often see the church
2. Where we get the power to change our vision

MP#1 How Jesus Sees The Church

Why did Jesus establish this relationship between Mary and John?

Why did he commend his mother into John's care?

When you first read it, it's easy to think that this was about Mary's material needs.

Mary was widowed by this time and you can imagine Jesus taking care of the financial needs of his elderly mother. But Mary probably in her late 40s. And Jesus probably hadn't supported his mother much financially anyway.

He was a travelling rabbi and he lived off donations. He even said:
"Foxes have holes, birds nests, Son of Man no place to lay head."

Furthermore, Mary already had plenty of support.

She was part of a large Jewish family.

Surrounded by relatives. Her sister was at the cross. Not told her name here. Another Mary at the cross, wife of Clopas, might have been Mary's sister-in-law.

In addition, Mary had other children. In Matthew 13:55, people say of Jesus.

"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?"

So Mary had four sons besides Jesus and several daughters.

By the way, Catholic church teaches that Mary did not have any other children and that she remained a virgin the rest of her life.

The way Catholics account for this verse is that the words "brothers" and "sisters" can be translated "cousins." That's true.

But the context of this verse in Matthew and a few others indicate that Mary and Joseph did have children together after Jesus was born.

So why was it so important to Jesus to place his mother in John's care?

Because at the time, Jesus' brothers, Mary's other sons, were not believers.

John 7:5 "For even his own brothers did not believe in Him."

Even though they could support their mother financially, Jesus knew that his mother needed more than financial support. She needed more than ties of natural blood. She had deeper spiritual needs.

So what was Jesus establishing? Not a financial arrangement.

What we have in this word from the cross is a picture of Jesus establishing the family of God. We have a miniature picture of the church.

John and Mary were united as mother and son by Jesus

because of their common faith in him as their Lord and Savior.

From that time on John took Mary into his own home.

It's a picture of the church as the family and household of God.

People united by Jesus as brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers

by their common faith in him. Jesus saw the church as a family believers need.

Several years ago read an article about children in foster care system:

“Amber is getting a makeover at the mall. Not that she needs one. She is picture pretty already, with blond hair and fetching green eyes. But this is a special occasion, and Amber, 16, wants to look her best. She's being filmed for a Wednesday's Child Segment on KTVB in Boise, Idaho, so she can find a family. A forever family that will do the ordinary things families do—go on picnics, eat out and see movies together. Amber has had four foster-care placements during the past two years. “I just want a mom and dad who will love me the way I am,” she says with an intensity that betrays the depth of her yearning.”

The article goes on to talk about what happens to children who turn 18 in foster care who have never been adopted.

They age out of the system. Given some financial support and help getting an apartment and a job.

But the thing they don't have is a family—and that's a gaping hole. They don't even have a foster family or group home anymore because the state no longer provides that for them.

The human heart cries out to belong, it cries out to be part of a family.

God created us for families. He created us for community.

We have our human families, our natural families—some are good, some not.

Some present and active in our lives, some, like this girl Amber, non-existent.

But because of sin and our fallen condition—natural families not enough.

They can't provide for us all the things we need to thrive spiritually.

And furthermore, they are all passing away.

So the Lord, through his life and death has established another family—

a spiritual family which is the church. As Jesus sees it, the church is something that all of his people need. So important to him, that even with his dying breath, he reaffirmed it and pushed the people he loved to be a part of it.

Do you see the church as Jesus did? It's a family of faith, that is absolutely necessary for your spiritual well-being.

It's a family of faith with relationships so close that Jesus himself described them as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

But unfortunately, that's not the way many Christians see the church.

Brings us to our second point . . .

MP#2 How American Christians Often See The Church

A number of church leaders, much smarter than I am, have noticed and commented on how in the last generation there has been a shift in how American Christians often see the church.

It's best described as a shift from church membership as a covenantal relationship to church membership as a commercial relationship.

We deal with businesses through a commercial relationship.

I need something. I want something, some product or service.

I look for the business that can supply it in a way satisfactory to me.

Might be the best price, best quality, or best customer service.

But in the end, it all about what that business can do for me.

When you go to Piggly Wiggly, you don't push your buggy around thinking—

What do I need to buy today that would be best for Piggly Wiggly.

How can I help Piggly Wiggly the most with my grocery money this week.

You say—What do I want. What do I need.

And if Piggly Wiggly doesn't have it, you go to Publix or Walmart.

And that's ok. That's the nature of commercial relationships.

God himself has established the commercial realm of human society.

Now, what's a covenantal relationship?

A covenant is when people bind themselves to each other with vows.

It's when people promise to be there for each other and help each other, even when it costs them, even when it's difficult.

There are great benefits and rich blessings that come to individuals in a covenant.

But decisions in a covenant are not based entirely on individual interests.

They are based on the interests of the people with whom you are in covenant.

Marriage is a covenantal relationship, not a commercial relationship.

When you hear about two people who get married and they keep his money and her money and split the bills and that sort of thing, you know they don't get it.

Viewing church membership as a covenantal relationship was probably more common in past generations. It's how our grandparents viewed church.

Christians tended to bind themselves to a local church body.

And then they lived out their Christian life within that body—

with all of its weaknesses and shortcomings and quirky people.

In other words, they saw the church as their spiritual family.

But this shift has taken place so that the important questions are no longer who are these people in my church? How can I know them and serve them? But, what can the church do for me?

If I'm going to spend my time and money at this church,
will it provide me with the services I require?

Are there programs at the church that meet my needs? My kids' needs?

Is it inspiring enough to make it worth my while?

Church leaders and pastors aren't innocent in this.

They often market churches as exciting, flashy places that provide it all.

But that makes it harder to see the church as the family of God.

Because Christians who think this way go to church like they go to grocery store.

They go at their convenience to get the things that they themselves personally need for their own spiritual benefit.

And they aren't willing to pay the cost in time and emotions to get to know the people in their church as family and to stick it out through tough times.

I'm not saying Christians shouldn't ever change churches.

There are good reasons to change churches.

There are good reasons to leave Christ Covenant and join another church.

I can't think of any but I'm sure there are.

But this is not really about those rare and prayerful times when you do change church membership, it's more about how you view your life within the church.

Tim Keller put it this way:

You can choose your church, but you can't choose the people in your church.

His point is: You make a covenant commitment to the church of your choice, and then you live with the people in that particular church as your spiritual family.

John didn't choose Mary and Mary didn't choose John.

Jesus chose them for each other and he chose members of church family for you.

And one of his last words and last requests was:

Look at these Christian family members and take them into your life.

That sounds wonderful. Church as family of God. But it's incredibly hard to do.

We're selfish and the commercial view of church membership appeals to us.

Get in, get what I need, and get out. Let's consider now . . .

MP#3 Where We Get The Power To Change Our Vision

Let's focus on Jesus words to Mary: "Woman. Look. Your Son."

What's strange about those words? Calling his mother, "Woman."

If you were dying, and your mother was there, and you knew these would be your last words to her, you wouldn't say, "Woman."
You would say, "Mother" or if a Southern boy, "Momma."

I read from the NIV this morning, and it says: "Dear woman."

But Jesus didn't say, "Dear woman." He just said "woman."

There is a word for "dear" in the New Testament but it's not here.

Reason NIV says "Dear woman," is to smooth it out and make easier to read.

So it doesn't sound like Jesus was being disrespectful.

But translating it that way covers up something important.

Because the fact is that Jesus calling his mother "woman" was jarring.

It was not a normal way to address your mother.

And Jesus said it intentionally because he was making a point. What was it?

The clue comes in the one other place where Jesus speaks this way to his mother.

It's in John 2 at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Jesus and Mary were at the wedding in village of Cana, and wine ran out.

Mary turned to Jesus and said, "They have no more wine."

Implied in her comment is: Do something about it. Show your power.

Jesus replied, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come."

Once again NIV softens this: "Dear woman, why do you involve me . . ."

We don't need to soften this. We know Jesus wasn't being disrespectful.

He was saying, Yes, I am your son but I am also the Son of God.

And I am following the timetable and the path the Father has set for me

to bring salvation to Israel. And it will not be the path that you expect, trust me.

Jesus loved his mother. And by addressing her as "woman" from the cross he was reminding Mary of that conversation.

Gospels tell us that Mary remembered and pondered everything about her son.

She would have remembered that conversation and miracle.

So Jesus was impressing this truth on her one last time.

I know you don't want me to leave you.

I am your son, and I am also the Son of God. I am the Messiah.

I have come to follow my Father's will and bring salvation.

And now that path will mean that I leave you for a time. Trust me.

Then adds something. I'm not leaving you alone.

I'm giving you a son. Look at John. He is your son now in my place.

Think about what that meant for Mary.

It meant that from then on she would look at John as her Jesus.

Whenever she missed Jesus, she would talk to John.

Whenever John helped her, or made her laugh, it was as if Jesus was doing it. And the flipside of this was that whenever Mary helped or served John in any way, it was as if she was doing it for Jesus.

Think what this means for your life in the church.

Jesus is no longer with us in the flesh. He's in heaven.

Until he comes, he is going to be with you through the members of your church.

They are going to be like Jesus to you and you are going to be like Jesus to them. If you want to get to know Jesus better, and know what he is like, and experience his presence in tangible ways, you will do so through the members of your church family, who are like Jesus to you.

And you are going to become more like Jesus by as you serve them in his place.

In a month an a half we're going to celebrate Christ Covenant's 25th anniversary.

Maybe you've seen the posters up around the church. It's going to be good. Among other things, Jamie Peterson will be preaching May 7, and we're going to enjoy dinner on the grounds.

When I think about how for me, personally, this church has been my Christian family and how you individually have been like Jesus to me, one thing stands out. Because I'm a preacher, I miss getting preached to.

I don't get that on Sundays and listening to recorded sermons is not the same.

Whenever we go in vacation over a Sunday, I always go to church for that reason. But in the in between times, I cherish the way so many of you preach to me—you preach the truth of God's word in real life situations.

I remember a few years ago someone asked to some see me.

I knew what it was about, knew the hard situation he was in and figured he wanted some biblical counsel and encouragement, so I gave some thought.

But when you came into my study, you preached to me.

Out of your mouth came words of faith and truth speaking to your situation—

You didn't need me, Jesus was your pastor and it was wonderful to behold.

And when you left, my faith in Christ was renewed.

You cannot know Jesus as you should and become like him apart from the church.

Solitary Christianity, Commercial Christianity is weak.

It's like choosing to be a foster child and age out of the system.

The church is precious to Jesus.

In his third word from the cross he reminds us that it is the family of God.

If you are a Christian, then you are a part of that family,

Jesus' dying wish is that you participate in it fully.

God's providence has led you at this time in your life to this particular congregation

Look, Jesus says. Look around you.

Look at people sitting on your pew to your right and your left.

These are your brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters.

You have a family.

And it is in this family that you see Jesus and know him better.