

## Sermon 3-7-18 God's Will and My Identity

Dear Family of God:

**"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said!"**

These were Mary's words to the angel Gabriel upon hearing that she would give birth to Jesus.

- Remember Mary wondered how this could be for she was a virgin
- The angel explained to her that "The Holy Spirit would come upon her."

So, how does Mary respond?

- She knows she may be accused of adultery
- She knew that the penalty for adultery was stoning

Yet, she willingly and graciously submits to God's will.

"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said!"

Mary was confessing her faith in God's will and ways. She in essence was saying: "Lord, You made a promise. I don't understand right now, but you are in control. I am the servant of the Lord. My life is yours. Let it be to me as you have said."

Jumping ahead to the cross on Calvary one Biblical writer wondered once if the angel Gabriel was anywhere near Golgotha that fateful Friday afternoon. If he was, what would Gabriel have seen?

- The White Temple Mount that usually shone with splendor in the sun, now dull and flat in the darkness of that afternoon.
- The bustle of the marketplace, oddly hushed in the heavy air.
- The hills of Bethlehem, off in the distance, where the angels had announced the birth of the Savior of the world to the shepherds
- The knot of people gathered around a garbage dump/executioner's hill simply known as The Skull

- And there, between two who had deserved death, the Savior Gabriel had proclaimed.

Jesus, nailed to a cross, with his mother Mary close at hand. Mary, the young woman whom Gabriel had visited with the news of Jesus' birth now is Mary, a grieving mother watching her son be crucified.

If Gabriel were looking down from the clouds that Good Friday afternoon he would have seen the horror. He would have seen the shame. He would have heard the jeering and the cries of pain.

But Gabriel would have also recognized, with wonder, a small family, clinging to each other in grief and fear; a new family at the foot of the cross.

Who was with Mary at the foot of Jesus' cross?

The Apostle John is painfully aware of Mary at his side. Imagine what John experienced at the foot of the cross with Mary.

- The smell of the vinegar offered to Jesus is bitter, but still holds a hint of wine.

Think of the first miracle of Jesus at the wedding of Cana when he turned water into wine. That was a festive occasion. Mary was at that wedding and so was the Apostle John. After that miracle the Bible says: "Jesus thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him." Jn 2:11b

John was also in the Upper Room when Jesus celebrated the Passover with the disciples which Jesus transitioned into the Lord's Supper. Again there was wine...this time the wine of the Passover cup which Jesus said: "This is My blood poured out for the sins of the world."

Now Jesus looks up to see Jesus' blood being poured out. What may have crossed John's mind at the foot of the cross?

- Did he feel the shame of his own sin?

- Did he remember the time when he fell asleep in Gethsemane while Jesus told him to “Watch and pray?”
- Did he recall when he and all of the disciples ran away from Jesus when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and betrayed by Judas? Mt 26:56

Was John feeling the weight of his sin standing next to Mary as he watched as the weight of the sin of the world crushed Jesus?

John heard Jesus pray, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

John must have been amazed at the grace of Jesus.

- The love that forgives even those who do one harm
- The love that John himself needs to have his sins washed away
- The love that each of us need to have our sins washed away

But then Jesus suddenly looks up through the sweat and the spit and the blood and says, “Behold, your mother,” John knows how deeply Jesus loves him personally, how deeply Jesus forgives, him personally.

When Jesus entrusts his own mother to John, when Jesus entrusts her future into the hands of a weak and fickle sinner, John must have known that he will never be the same. He knows he is part of a new family, at the foot of the cross.

Jumping back to shortly after Jesus’ birth (8 days) when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to present Jesus to the Lord according to the Old Testament law Mary heard the words of Simeon who took the baby Jesus in his arms and said to Mary: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against...and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.” Lk 2:34f

Simeon was prophesying about Jesus crucifixion and Mary’s personal grief that she would experience at the foot of the cross. Think of what Mary saw at the foot of the cross.

- The feet of Jesus' driven through by an iron spike
- The sharp javelin of the Roman soldier as he lifts up a sponge of wine vinegar
- Perhaps she then remembered the words of Simeon spoken to her some 30 years earlier

Simeon had spoken of the salvation that the Lord had prepared before the face of all people, and light for the Gentiles and glory for Israel, but now at the foot of the cross there was only darkness and death.

Mary felt the "sword piercing her soul" before during the life of Jesus...

- When Jesus at the age of 12 was left behind in Jerusalem in the temple
- When Jesus did battle with the devil in the wilderness for 40 days and nights
- When Jesus said that his mother and brothers were those who did God's will and not those necessarily but of his physical lineage Mark 3

Remember the Bible says that "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Lk 2:19 At the foot of the cross Mary most likely remembered...

- The angel Gabriel's message to her
- The visit of the wise men after Jesus' birth
- The miracles of Jesus
- His betrayal and arrest
- His suffering and pain

What did she say to the angel long ago: "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Perhaps these words were on her heart when at the foot of the cross Jesus says to her: "Dear woman, here is your son." John 19:26 In all of Jesus' agony and horror on the cross He says to May: "Behold your son!" and turns to John and says: "Behold your mother."

To Mary it may have seem like a final farewell but the fact that Jesus could even imagine her need and her future in the fog of his pain is a gift to her heart.

Mary knows she is part of a new family at the foot of the cross.

See Jesus at the cross. See his love for John and Mary but also for you and me.

- By His word of forgiveness we also become a new family
- At the foot of the cross we also become a new family

May we like Mary submit to God's plan for us as Mary responded: "Let it be to me according to word."

- Mary did not always understand but she trusted in Jesus. She trusts that Jesus knows what he is talking about.
- Mary stays with Jesus, even in the face of suffering
- She knows a sword will pierce her heart because of Jesus suffering.
- But Mary will not leave Jesus' side.

**"Let it be to me according to your word!"**

- I am the servant of the Lord
- My life is yours