

Vespers 3-3-21, The Third Word Seven Last Words from the Cross HWD

Woman behold your son. Son behold your mother. (John 19:25-27)

**Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus
were his mother, and his mother's sister,
Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.
When Jesus saw his mother
and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her,
he said to his mother,
"Woman, here is your son."
Then he said to the disciple,
"Here is your mother."
And from that hour
the disciple took her into his own home.**

Growing up,

one of our favorite family movies was,
Bird Cage—the late 90's film
with Robin Williams,
Nathan Lane and Gene Hackman.

The movie is truly,
hysterical and heartwarming.
Robin Williams and Nathan Lane
were brilliant comedic partners.
And even though the movie itself
featured a rather controversial cultural subject,
at its heart it is a movie about
family.

Williams and Lane portray a couple
who live in South Beach, Miami
and own gaudy night club.

The couple's son surprises them one evening
announcing he is getting married.
Adding to their shock,
he tells them he is marrying
the daughter of conservative northern Senator, Kevin Keely.

Throughout the movie, each family,

Armond and Albert,
the flamboyant night club owners
and Kevin and Louise,
the strait-laced, plain Jane politicians,
are bent on keeping up appearances,
fabricating white lies
to impress each other.

These two families could not be any different.
They are on completely different ends
of all sorts of spectrums
and are trying to figure out,
how they will come together as a family.

The movie is a delightful comedy
that in the end, brings two families,
two opposite types of people,
people who likely see the world very differently,
together.

And to drive home family as the central theme,
the opening credits and ending scenes (of the movie)
are wedded together
by Sister Sledge's hit 70's song,
We Are Family.

For the church
this is a well-known struggle,
how to really become a family,
a family of faith.

A family where you can be who you really are
and be loved, welcomed, and integrated
into the body of Christ.

A family where we don't all
have to agree on everything
but are willing to love each other
just the same.

Ideally what the church represents,

is a home base
where you will always be
part of something larger than yourself.
Robert Frost once wrote,
“home is the place where,
when you have to go there,
they have to take you in.”¹

Church is to be a place, a community
for all people and all kinds of people.
A place that will always,
take you in.
No matter what family
you might have been born into,
the family of faith is one where,
even though we don't sing
the 70's song on a Sunday morning,
we certainly should strive to make a reality,
that We Are Family.

And in this third word,
Woman behold your Son
and Son behold your mother,
this third word
from our Seven Last Words series
points to the birth of a new kind of family.²

On the cross,
not only does Christ give us his life,
but the cross is where we are also given
an unexpected gift—
the creation of a new family of faith,
the church.
We have been using Frances Taylor Gench's book,
Encounters with Jesus,
in our sermon series

¹ Referenced in Judith Mattison, *The Seven Last Words of Christ: The Message of the Cross for Today*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN 1992. Pg. 33

² Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus; Studies in the Gospel of John* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2007) pg. 14

and Front Porch Sunday school class.

In her book Gench writes,

“In his dying moments,
Jesus performs the last act
of his public ministry
as he speaks to his mother
and to one who is known to us
only as the ‘Beloved Disciple,’
and entrusts them to each other.

‘When Jesus saw his mother
and the disciple whom he loved
standing beside her,
he said to his mother,
“Woman, here is your son.”
Then he said to the disciple,
“Here is your mother.”
And from that hour
the disciple took her into his own home.’

These words from the cross,”
Gench writes,
“give birth to a church,
a new family of faith.”³

And here,
as elsewhere in the New Testament,
the family model
that is repeated over and over
is that of adoption.

In the first century, Jesus’ words from the cross
resemble the words used
in adoption ceremonies of his time.
And in this way,
kinship in is not only defined by blood lines
but kinship is defined by faith
in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴

³ Ibid, pg.14

⁴ Ibid, pg. 14

In his letter to the church in Galatia,
Paul says, “...when the fullness of time had come,
God sent his son,
born of a woman...
so that we might receive adoption as children.”

Paul repeats the message of adoption
and this new family of faith
in his letters to his churches
again and again,
“for in Jesus Christ
you are all children of God
through faith.”⁵

The theme of adoption
and a new family of faith
was repeated over and over,
because coming together is hard.
Forming a family is not easy.
But being a family of faith
was crucial to John’s vision
of the mission and ministry of Christ.
We see this in the opening verses
of John’s gospel,
“But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave the power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood
or the will of the flesh
or the will of man,
but of God.” (1:12-13)

We are family.
We are not all alike,
we are not all in agreement
all of the time,
but we belong to each other
—we are a family of faith.

⁵ Gal. 4:5-7, NRSV

Later in John's gospel,
when Jesus gives his disciples
a final address,
and foreshadows the coming of the Holy Spirit,
he tells them,
I will not leave you orphaned.⁶

In his dying breaths
he draws those who believe
into his life's ministry
to be a new kind of family
—one where blood lines and last names
and the same eyebrows
aren't the features that tell the world
what family you belong to.

In this new family
it is the way you radically love each other;
the way you care
for the community around you;
it is the way stand up
for truth and justice and offer mercy;
the way you welcome and integrate
everyone into the household of God.
In short, it is the way you become a family.

Years ago, I heard a story,
and it has stayed with me ever since.
In fact, I told it in a sermon (I looked it up)
in 2016 and so some of you
might remember it.
While it is a story that takes place on a soccer field, it
is a story that speaks a truth that the church can
understand.

This comes from author and speaker, Glennon Doyle:

*Okay, this is what Craig just told me
about his men's league soccer game last night:*

⁶ Jn. 14:18, NRSV

*"The game was crazy.
We were playing our league rivals
and both teams were so fired up.
People were playing dirty
and cursing at each other
and even the guys on the benches
were screaming.*

*Then, in the middle of a play-
somebody yelled onto the field:
LOOKING FOR A KID!"*

*And everybody on the field froze
and everybody on the bench shut up.
And we learned that a guy from the other team
couldn't find his four-year-old.*

*And without speaking-
everybody just stopped the game and ran.
We ran in every direction
and guys from my team
partnered with guys from the other team
to comb the fields.*

*One guy and I went to the parking lot
and stood in the middle of the entrance
and stopped any car from leaving.
For ten minutes- we became this search team.
And then somebody found the little guy.
He'd wandered off with another family.*

*And one of the guys from the other team-
one of the guys I'd just told to shut up
'cause he was screaming so loud-
was standing there holding the little guy-
hugging him so tight and we all just stared.
And then we started the game again.*

Everybody played just as hard

*but there was less yelling.
Everybody played cleaner.”*

*Right now, Glennon writes,
Everything’s loud and dirty
and both benches are screaming at each other.
We’ll make it through.
But I want to do better than that, she says
I want to make it through TOGETHER.*

*To make it through together we gotta remember that even in the heat of the
game: there are some rules of engagement. One of the rules is that every once in
a while, we just gotta stop yelling and take care of each other’s babies.
That’s the truest rule.
Even with so many benches and so many teams and dirty play – we still know we
belong to each other. We still know there is no such thing as other people’s
children.”⁷*

It’s that last line,
there is no such thing as other people’s children
...that is what gets me.

That is the truth the church lives to tell.
That is the truth of two people
at the foot of the cross
who aren’t related,
*Woman behold your son;
Son behold your mother,*
we are family;
there is no such thing
as other people’s children.

This family of faith, the church,
is a gift from our Lord.
It is gift that allows anyone
and everyone
a home base, a place, a family.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/glennondoylemelton/posts/10153948986954710>

And you know what?

We aren't far away

from being able to have a family reunion;

when we can be together again!

And you know what?

When it is safe to sing,

I have a great 70's disco song

in mind..