

Foundations: From the Cross 3
Dear Woman
John 19:25-27 (AFBC 2/24/18)

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Perhaps you recall hearing in school about the Greek philosopher Epictetus, or at least you've heard something about the Stoic philosophy which he and others espoused. We still use this term when we suggest that certain people are rather Stoic in their demeanor.

The Stoics asked little or nothing from life—as opposed to the Epicureans who wanted "all the gusto they could get," meaning they put a high value on pleasure.

The Stoics, by contrast, sought to be satisfied with whatever happened to them in life—good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.

Although, when it came to dying, the Stoic Epictetus did aim for something quite specific. Listen to what the wise philosopher wrote:

"I should like best that (death) should find me busy at something noble and beneficent and for the good of all mankind. But since that is little likely to befall me, I should choose next to go out rendering what is due to every relation in life."

As we look back and contemplate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it seems to me that we concern ourselves almost totally with what Jesus did for "the good of all mankind," to pick up on that first aspiration of Epictetus. And that's as it should be, I suppose.

Christ died for the whole world. Paul tells us, **"God was in Christ reconciling the whole world unto himself."**

And as John writes earlier in his Gospel, **“God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

There is this universal, world-wide significance to Jesus’ death, to be sure. But there’s another emphasis in Jesus’ ministry that we shouldn’t miss. If we do, our understanding of Jesus will be diminished.

When we see Jesus looking down from His cross to speak to His mother and to His disciple, John, we witness His concern for the individual.

This is an aspect of Jesus’ ministry that we should not overlook. His focus was not only on “the world,” it was also on your individual life, and mine.

Although Jesus lived and died for the whole world, he never lost sight of the fact that the world is made up of individuals, each with his or her own unique needs and hurts.

To put this another way, Jesus never got so caught up in the big picture of humankind that he could not still focus on the much smaller and more intimate picture of individual men and women, boys and girls.

Jesus’ concern, then, was as wide as the whole world, but it was also as specific as each of our personal wants and needs and dreams.

As I think about things such as these, hymns often come to mind for me; but this time, it was a couple of children’s songs. Most of us know them well.

The first goes like this: “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

That’s a beautiful little song with a very important message. Jesus loves everybody, everywhere, without any need to place the kinds of labels on people that others are prone to do. Thank you, Jesus, for showing us a better way.

This message of Jesus' love for everybody, though, takes on even greater significance when we're able to sing by faith, "Jesus loves me, this I know." He loves all the little children of the world—GOOD! But He also very specifically loves "THIS CHILD."

Let me relate this to the passage before us. Jesus had taken the sins of the whole world upon his shoulders.

He'd been beaten and ridiculed, he'd experienced the pain of having nails driven through his hands, a spike through his feet-- yet he still showed compassion for those individuals gathered around his cross.

Friends, this should say to us that Jesus' love and concern does indeed reach out to each one of us. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves you—and not just as part of some vast humanity.

Jesus knows and loves each of us personally. I believe this is vitally important to our understanding and experience of the Christian Gospel.

But there's something else here that makes this message from the cross even more specific—and to miss this is to omit something very important from the life and message of Jesus.

Notice, please, who this is that Jesus shows such special concern for at the cross. It's his mother, Mary. In this moment of anguish, he focuses on her.

Remember what the philosopher Epictetus said: **"I should choose next to go out rendering what is due to every relation in life."**

As Jesus neared the end of his life, He had a special concern for His mother. He wanted to make sure that she would be cared for in his absence.

So, Jesus entrusted the care of Mary to John. He told the two of them that their relationship from that day forward was to be as mother and son. And Scripture tells us that John took Mary into his home and cared for her from that day forward.

I don't believe we're reading too much into this to see in this third statement Jesus made from the cross our Lord's concern regarding our own responsibilities toward our families.

Do you know that there were four women at the foot of Jesus' cross that day? There was, of course, Mary, the mother of Jesus. There was another woman named Mary who is described as being the wife of a man named Clopas.

The third woman was Salome, a sister of Jesus' mother and the mother of the Apostles James and John. And, finally, there was Mary Magdalene.

But please notice that Jesus used these precious final moments before His death to make sure that his mother would be adequately cared for. This should come as no surprise. The Bible speaks over and over again of our responsibility to our families.

We have a specific God-given duty to make sure the needs of our family members are being met. Those needs include the basics—food, clothes, and shelter.

But I have to believe—and this is where we often drop the ball in this regard—I believe taking care of family also includes their emotional and spiritual needs. These are the needs that are often not taken as seriously as they should be, and may be neglected as a result.

We get so focused on our own agendas—accomplishing goals or pursuing interests and amusements of various kinds--that we sometimes neglect the people and the relationships that are the most important.

It's like the story I heard about a basketball coach who had to admit to doing this--getting "a little too focused" on something that shouldn't have been his top priority.

It seems that the coach and his three year old son had gone to the barber shop for a haircut. It was a Saturday afternoon. The TV in the shop was on, and the coach got very interested in a defensive strategy being employed by one of the teams.

He left the barber shop and quickly made his way home, hoping to catch the end of the game. His wife wasn't home, so he was set to keep on watching and analyzing what he was seeing!

Two hours later, the phone rang. The barber said, "Coach, little Jeffrey's read all the comic books that we have, and we're about to close the shop. What do you want us to do with your son?"

Of course, there are worse cases than that. Little Matthew Murray's father took his infant son and put him in a car seat. He then put the car seat on top of the car while he loaded all the stuff he needed to take with him for work that day.

Mr. Murray then got in his car and headed for the office. He was up to nearly 50 miles per hour when, in his rearview mirror, he saw a diaper flying through the air. Before he could fully process that, he saw the car seat--with his son still in it--flying off the trunk lid.

Miraculously, the car seat landed upright in the median, and by the time that panicked father got to him, he reports the little fellow was smiling as if to say, "Let's do that again, Daddy." Anyway, that's his story and he's sticking to it!

Sometimes we get so focused on what we're doing in the moment, or on the bigger picture of being a success, making and saving enough money to feel secure, providing all of life's extras, that the only need we do meet for our families is the physical or financial need. Somehow we must find a healthier balance between career and family, money and relationships.

Jesus was involved in the most important work in the history of humankind, yet he took the time to show his love and concern for his mother.

I think this makes a statement. It means that providing proper care for our families is one aspect of Christ-likeness. To be like Jesus Christ... is to take care of our family.

Notice, also, that, in this moment, Jesus' concern for His mother was focused on the "here and now"—her immediate care, in other words.

Certainly we should emphasize the eternal dimensions of the Gospel, but coupled with that, we should not lose sight of the needs that people face in the present--their daily needs.

It takes nothing away from our concern for evangelism to also be concerned about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and caring for the orphaned, the aged, and the alienated.

Evangelism and benevolent ministries go hand and hand as the church's dual responsibility to those in need. Jesus made this clear by demonstrating His concern for the whole person. He was concerned about each person—each individual.

The Apostle John provides us with a beautiful example of Jesus' love for the individual in the way he refers to himself. He speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Now, I think John was well aware that Jesus loved the other disciples. John knew that Jesus loved the whole world—and said so. But John also understood that Jesus had a tremendous love for him. He, personally, felt dearly loved.

So how about us—each one of us? Do we each have this understanding in our own walk with the Lord? As a Christian, do we all know and understand ourselves to be 'disciples—followers of Jesus--whom He loves?'

I believe this matters, friends. We're not just a tiny part of the world that He loves, or the church that He loves. Jesus' love is far more personal than that!

I don't want you to leave here today without having this conviction deep in your heart that God loves you, just as you are, with all your quirks, with that bad side that you know you have, as well as the good side that we all know about.

WE may not know about your bad side, but somebody does! God does too! Yet He loves you in spite of it. He loves you with your successes and failures.

God loves you enough to be with you, not just in eternity, but now—in this very moment—He’s with you to care for you, and to guide you, and to give you the strength you need.

And, yes, God even loves you enough to hold you accountable—because true love does that too!

Don’t miss this—the message of Jesus’ third word from the cross: that while He was dying there for the whole world, He still sought to meet the needs of one person—or maybe we should say two.

John may well have needed to provide this care for Jesus’ mother just as much as Mary needed for him to do it. You follow that, don’t you?

The point is Jesus has concern for each one of us, and He seeks to speak words of comfort and love and encouragement to every heart—TO us, when its needed; but often THROUGH us on its way to someone else... who needs to know they’re cared for.

Jesus came to seek and to save a lost and dying world, but listen: He came to seek and save me.

Jesus gave his life on Calvary’s cross for the sins of all humanity, but He also died for me.

Jesus loves all the children of the world, but Jesus loves me. And Jesus loves you!

Do you know this? Is this wonderful assurance lodged deep in your heart—in your soul, your psyche.

Please know this, friend—be so convinced of this that nothing can ever shake you from this conviction--that Jesus Christ cares for you; and that nothing, NOTHING, will ever separate you from His love. Thanks be to God!