

Woman, here is your son...

**Woman, here is your son...**  
**Sermon on Good Friday**

When someone we love is dying, we hang on every word. Is there something he needs? A final message he wants to make? Often we keep these last words for years to come, pondering their meaning, struggling sometimes to come to terms with them...

For generations Christians have gathered at the cross of Christ to ponder his last words.

The “seven last words” of Jesus – seven sentences that the gospels record Jesus saying from the cross before he died – have captured the imaginations of preachers, writers, musicians of at least the last 400 years.

One of them is the stuff for my Good Friday sermon today. Words which you find within the 4<sup>th</sup> reading in your service sheet.

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

The place where the Crucified spoke his last words and breathed his last breath is the place where suffering and evil are met by the unconditional love of God. At the foot of the cross all suffering, all evil, all failure and all wrongs are touched by love.

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

(John 19: 23-27)

Standing near the cross of Jesus are some of his dearest family members and friends. In a gesture that expresses the reconciling power of the cross, Jesus now gives Mary, his mother, to the beloved disciple, and the beloved disciple to Mary. “Women,” he says gently, “here...”

However close the two of them may have been up to this moment, from now on Christ has drawn them into fuller, more intimate, and more conscious connection with each other than they had before.

Jesus shows them, how much they now matter to each other, how much they need each other in this world of broken relationships, loneliness and lovelessness. He sees their hunger to have people in their lives who know them and who love them.

Jesus shows them and shows us how valuable and how important it is to belong somewhere, or to someone, to experience friendship and community.

But we all also know plenty of ways to avoid human relationship. We can dive into the next drink, grab another handful of biscuits, or hide behind our work. And if we feel a little anxious or bored, we go shopping. Feeling sad or lonely, we can forget in front of the TV set.

In short, do something – anything – rather than risk sharing our real selves with those close to us, and admitting the truth of our deep need to connect.

With his words “Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother” Jesus recognises people’s deep need to connect. Especially in the times of crisis, grief and fear...

Woman, here is your son...

In his outpouring love on the cross, Jesus not only gives himself, he gives us back to each other – across genders, across generations – restoring connection among all human beings, those near to us and those far from us.

Jesus' message on the cross, and from the cross, is to create communities of mutual belonging and affection.

If I understand this properly, it may help me to see Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross as an invitation to reach out to my fellow human beings, build up relationships, love and live the fullness of friendship rather than hiding or withdrawing – especially in times of pain.

Pain must be shared.

Jesus seems to know this so well.

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

Nobody should have to deal with this dark and horrible hour on his or her own! Learn to love each other; learn to trust each other; care for each other; he says from his cross. Knowing that even love needs to grow, to be built up at times... knowing that it may be wise to stay close to the cross, because it is the place where God's love is poured out and community is being formed.

“Woman, here is your son.”

With Jesus' words from the cross ringing in our ears, we can find the courage and the will to do what we can to honour the people he is giving us to love.

And when we are disappointed or frustrated in our human relationships, it is the cross to which we can return, remembering Christ's great love.

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

Just do this as an exercise for once. Look around in this church. Look at each other and think: man, here is your daughter, woman, here is your sister, father, here is your son, son, here is your family...

How does this feel?

There is a sense of belonging coming from the cross.

Would you have ever thought of this?

Jesus is giving us to each other!

I must admit, discovering this, moves me deeply.

And it changes a whole lot in me.

In my thinking about family, friends, relationships... In my approach towards others... in the expectations I may have towards others.

The love that comes to us from the cross extends not only to our small circle of family members and closest friends, but to everyone.

It is not a Christian cliché to say that we are all one family. It is actually a very worth while exercise to do. And if we do it seriously, it changes our way of relating to others forever!

Woman, here is your son...

In her book “Christ’s Passion, Our Passions” Margaret Bullit-Jonas, an Anglican priest, shares one of the most painful and most important, and maybe even most precious moments of her life.

>> I remember a cold winter morning ten years ago, not long after the death of my daughter Rebecca. She was our second child and perfect in every way, but she was born two months too soon. After a four-hour ordeal in intensive care, during which her tiny arms were spread wide so that the monitors, needles and tubes could be affixed to her body, my husband and I finally consented to stop heroic medical intervention. We gently removed Rebecca from her cross, and she died quietly in our arms.

I have never felt, neither before nor since, a loss so pure and a sorrow so deep. Desperate for an extended period of prayer, I decided to spend a few days at a retreat house on the seacoast north of Boston. On a cold winter morning I found myself sitting in the dining hall and weeping into my coffee as I watched the waves of the Atlantic rise and crest and fall. It occurred to me that Rebecca’s life, like that of every mortal, was as transient as a wave. What could I do with the passionate love that had been released with her birth and death? It seemed I had three choices.

I could cling fiercely to the small “wave” that was Rebecca and refuse to let her go. I could hang on tight and drown myself in bitterness and anger.

A second possibility was to remove myself entirely from such ardent personal love and mildly try to love the ocean as a whole. I could strive for stoic indifference and coolly love humanity from afar. I could try to refrain from loving any waves in particular.

A third possibility – the insight that broke open my heart – was that I could love all the waves with the love that I’d known in this one wave. Maybe Rebecca was my doorway to perceiving the preciousness of every person. Maybe the fervent love that I felt for this one small child was a glimpse into the love that God holds for each one of us.

The stranger leaning impatiently over his steering wheel as he hurtles past me on the highway: He is loved by God as I loved and still love Rebecca. The white-haired lady choosing toothpaste at the drug store, the neighbour walking his dog, the weary postal clerk who hardly says hello – each is loved by God as I love Rebecca.

“Here is your daughter”, says a voice within me as I gaze at them. Through the cross of Christ, the love I feel for my daughter is everywhere I look. It belongs to everyone.<<

When Jesus says, “here is your mother...” he is inviting us not only to cherish Mary, Queen of heaven, mother of our saviour, but to cherish everyone who he is giving to us to love...

He reveals to us our connections with one another, with God, and with all creation.

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

May these words resonate within us.

May they raise questions in us.

May they challenge us.

Woman, here is your son...

Do I see other people with loving eyes?

Do I honestly long for genuine connection? If not, why not?

Am I willing to initiate or restore some relationships for Jesus' sake?

And if so, what would be the best way to do so?

As I go from this pulpit today, will I remember these words from the cross?

Will I listen to them, when I meet other people?

Will they become a guideline to how I see and meet and treat others?

The Jesus of the cross with his outstretched arms is offering community to me:

“Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother”!

How do I respond?

How do you?

Here on this day, at the foot of this cross, we are given to each other  
to love each other.

Let us never forget and let us treasure that.

Amen.