

Luke 1:26-38

March 4, 2018

“A New Family –
God’s Will and My Identity”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

4th Sunday of Epiphany

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[*Gabriel*] I wonder...

I wonder if Gabriel hovered anywhere near Golgotha that fateful Friday afternoon.

If he had,

could you imagine what that captain of the angel armies would have seen?

The White Temple Mount,

that usually shone with splendor in the sun,

was now dull and flat in the darkness of that afternoon.

The hustle and bustle of the marketplace, oddly hushed in the heavy air.

The hills of Bethlehem were off in the distance,

that place where Gabriel had announced the birth

of the Savior of the world to shepherds.

Gabriel would have seen a knot of people gathered around a garbage dump

that was the executioner’s hill simply known as The Skull -- Golgotha.

And there, between two who had deserved death

was the Savior that Gabriel had proclaimed.

Jesus, nailed to a cross, with his mother,

Mary close at hand—

I wonder... would Gabriel have recognized the young girl

that he called blessed and highly favored?

That seems so long ago now —he would have seen Jesus, and Mary, and John.

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 that angelic messenger 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.

[*John*] John is painfully aware of Mary at his side,
a woman he has learned to respect and even love as he has traveled with Jesus.

The smell of the vinegar they offer is bitter, but still holds a hint of wine.
The crowd says they want Elijah to show up,
but the wine has John thinking of a wedding party in a small town called Cana.

Mary was there, and John came with Jesus ...
And Jesus said, "My hour has not yet come."
But that is no longer true. **THIS IS THE HOUR.**

Awaken from his day dream, John heard Jesus pray,
Father forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.

He was amazed at that kind of grace,
the love that forgives even those who do it harm,
but he does not personally feel forgiven.

He knew what he was doing.
It would have been better to die with Jesus
than stand here watching his life slowly trickle away,
knowing that you did nothing to stop it.

But then Jesus suddenly looks up
through the sweat and the spit and the blood and says,
"Behold, your mother,"

When Jesus entrusts his own mother to John,
one of those who slept through his agony in the Garden,
one of those who ran with newly washed feet out into the darkness...

When Jesus entrusts his own mother and her future
into the hands of a weak and fickle sinner,
John knows he will never be the same.

He knows he is part of a new family, at the foot of the cross.

[*Mary*] Mary is completely oblivious to John at her side.
She sees Jesus' feet driven through by an iron spike into wood
and she remembers his first toddling steps taken on Egyptian sand.

She sees the sharp javelin of the Roman soldier
as he lifts up a sponge of wine vinegar,
and she suddenly recalls the prophet Simeon,
and the words she has long pondered in her heart:
“A sword will pierce your own soul ...” the prophet had said,
a haunting counterpoint to the hymn of praise he had just sung.

This doesn't feel like the salvation the Lord had prepared
before the face of all people,
no light for the Gentiles, or glory for Israel;
only darkness, and death.

She has felt separation from Jesus before, *OF COURSE*,
when he first left the carpenter's shop to wander in the wilderness
and came back changed.

She thought a sword had pierced her soul
the day Jesus had refused to come home with the rest of the family
like a sensible son:
he had even claimed that
those who do God's will were
his mother and brothers and sisters.

It felt like she had been abandoned that day,
but it didn't last, and it wasn't like this!
“The one who does God's will is my mother ...” Jesus had said.

Mary remembers. Mary remembers Joseph. She remembers the angel.
She remembers her own response, so long ago:
“I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Mary is just praying that prayer again
when Jesus looks up from the pain,
and through a split lip that slightly slurs his speech,
he talks directly to her for the first time in what feels like weeks:
“Woman, look! Here is your son!”

She is confused for just a moment
as she beholds Jesus on the cross in all his agony and horror and glory.
“Behold your son!” he says, and she does.
But then, with a slight turn of his head,
he makes what eye contact he can with the man just to her right.
“Behold, your mother.”

Only now does Mary realize she has been leaning
on the strong arm of John in her grief.
And although it feels like a final farewell,
the fact that Jesus could even imagine her need and her future
in the fog of his pain is a gift to her mother's heart.

For a moment, Mary is caught between the past and the future;
for a moment, she has both Jesus and John.

And the roar of the grief and the anger and the helpless pain recedes,
if only by a degree.
For Mary knows she is part of a new family, at the foot of the cross.

[Conclusion]

Briefly look through the eyes of Jesus on the cross
his love is for John and Mary, but his love is also for us.

By his word of forgiveness we – you and I – also become a new family.
Standing before the cross we are a family.
Look to your left (yes do it) and look to your right... this is your family.
Look at the people in front of you. Now, look at the people behind you...
this is your family.

You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.
And at times, suffering is hard to understand...
And the suffering of Jesus upon the cross is hard – so hard to understand.
But in this hurt the will of God is done.
Your sins are forgiven, salvation, even life everlasting is yours.

So it's salvationly important – salvationly necessary to be in the family of Jesus.
He alone has the words of eternal life.
He alone has a Baptism that saves you.
He alone has a Lord's Supper body and blood
that bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

We are a new family – this is God's Will and My Identity. AMEN!

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good
that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.
Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
