

**John 19 verses 26, 27** (Third saying of Jesus on the cross)

When Jesus saw his mother and his favourite disciple with her he said to his mother, 'This man is now your son'. Then he said to the disciple 'She is now your mother'. From then on that disciple took her into his own home.

Dr Anita Oji      Good Friday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019

I married into a polygamous family. My mother in law was the first of six wives. I met most of them when we visited the village in West Africa where they lived. My father in law had died before my marriage so I never met him. It was when my mother in law died that one of the other wives came to our house where we were staying with our children and graciously told us that she was now the grandmother to my four children. To me they were some of the most beautiful words that I had heard and it was an unexpected gift. It was not because she had candy in her pocket to give to my girls but it brought an emotional closeness that could not be bought. Africans believe that we become who we are in and through other people. Day to day family relationships can be supportive, encouraging and healthy when nothing else can. They allow us to share experiences, good and bad. In contrast our own Western culture can be isolating because although we live in crowded places, we idealise individual autonomy and personal freedom and face to face relationships are excluded in preference to virtual ones. Tweeting about the crucifixion sanitises and removes the physical drama with its noise, smells, contact and gut reactions between Jesus and his friends and family. In her book, 'Good Friday people' Dr Sheila Cassidy is amazed at the selflessness with which so many people face violent death. She comments that their last thoughts are for the people they love, support for the values by which they have lived and for which they die. As a victim of torture herself she writes about Archbishop Romero who was a 20<sup>th</sup> century martyr and whose family was the church in El Salvador. In the minutes before he died he speaks 'may (we) give our body and blood to suffering and pain like Christ, not for self, but to impart notions of justice and peace to our people'.

In the bible passage from Saint John's gospel Mary and her child, Jesus, are close enough to converse yet each breath for Jesus while they spoke was restricted, painful and suffocating. Jesus must have struggled to articulate his final legacy to those he loved. The favourite disciple is assumed to be John because often in the gospel John does not mention his own name (John 21v24). Of Jesus' disciples, only John is recorded as being present at this time of Jesus' crucifixion. John was younger brother to James and they were the sons of Zebedee all working together in the family fishing business. His mother, Salome, is thought to be sister to Mary, Jesus' mother (Matthew 27 v56, Mark 15v40, John 19v25) so that family relationship is likely to have brought these people together in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover (Luke 2 verse 41). It was a family in trouble, Mary was now the mother of a suspected criminal, Jesus her son dying before her eyes.

Most commentators concentrate on the vulnerability of Mary. Mary must have been in emotional chaos; her first child had been tortured and was still living hung and skewered by nails. She must have felt physically sick. She had nursed him through childhood illnesses which had a high mortality in those days. She must have thought back to his birth with all the extraordinary happenings in association with it: her

consent to the pregnancy at the annunciation, gifts from kings (including myrrh, a resin used in embalming), refuge sought in another country, meeting Simeon and Anna in the Temple and so on. It was Simeon who warned Mary in these words: 'The child will be like a warning sign. Many people will reject him, and you, Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger' (Luke 2 v34, 35). And now Jesus grown into manhood takes control, he identifies his earthly responsibilities and provides for her, at this point when she wants to comfort him. I doubt if she takes it in. Perhaps John recognised the loving care Jesus had for his mother and responded in kind.

However, in my experience it is the big strong men who faint when they see a needle approach them. Blood (as would be present at a crucifixion) has the same effect and the sight of it for example at the birth of a baby, can lead to the father being gently led out of the delivery suite. Perhaps it is John who needs care from Mary rather than the more usual way round. He is likely to be overcome with emotion, yet by upbringing does not show it but Jesus is aware of it and organises his mother to be a distraction.

John describes a brief but timely encounter. Sometimes it is the unexpected encounter with Christ that has the lasting impact on us. How Jesus speaks to us now is the key to our lives in the future. Does he send us a grandmother, a mother or a nephew? Rather he welcomes each of us into the family of the church for which he gave his life and intercedes for our eternal salvation.

**Prayer**

Merciful God, you bring us close to Jesus Christ through your Word.

Jesus our Saviour brings us together in love.

We are in awe of His suffering for us.

We recognise our relationship to him as our Lord and Saviour and are thankful.

At this time we pray for families who suffer violence, families who bear the loss of children, families who face ridicule and abuse. In their distress Lord, bring hope.

We ask for your healing spirit to be poured on fractured families, giving strength to confront fears and pain.

Lord Jesus, give us wisdom in establishing new relationships.

May God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit unite us as a family in your presence now and bring the gifts of love and peace to each one of us.

**Amen.**