

# Abiding Faith, Hope and Love

## Good Friday Meditation

### April 2, 2021

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 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," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 19:23-27

I Corinthians 13 ends with these words: *"So faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* From the Gospel of John's perspective, abiding faith, hope and love are very much on display at the foot of the cross.

First, **FAITH**. In the Gospel of John there is a somewhat anonymous disciple referred to as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."* One thing to notice is this person is within conversational earshot of the cross. As best we can tell, all the other disciples have fled the scene ... except for Judas, who is now dead. Their beloved leader was being executed, and perhaps the disciples had a valid fear that they, being his closest friends and supporters, were next on the "hit list." And, for all intents and purposes, the cause seemed lost ... their hopes, their dreams, their ideals were also being crucified along with the One in Whom they placed their hopes, their dreams, their ideals; they could no longer see any hope, so they didn't hang around. No disciples followed Jesus to the foot of the cross. No one, that is, except *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."*

The "beloved disciple" braves the circumstances and comes right up to the foot of the cross. In the face of apparent hopelessness, despite the dark shadows of danger and despair, he still chooses to take his stand by his Lord ... come what may. What a display of bold faith. In the stark simplicity of this account, it is easy to miss just how remarkable is this act of simply ... being there. No matter what the risk, no matter how desperate and bleak the outlook, he displays abiding faith in taking his stand by Jesus AND by doing what Jesus bids him do, which is to take Mary into his care.

Anyone who has taken either a close friend or relative into their family knows what an imposition that can be on the family. This disciple, however, makes no objection to the trouble or inconvenience. No matter what the inconvenience, he is glad for an opportunity to be of service to his Lord. So ... **FAITH** abides at the foot of the cross in the person of the beloved disciple. A faith that stands with Jesus Christ no matter what the risk, and a faith ready to do whatever Jesus Christ might ask no matter what the imposition.

Just as something of an aside, just who is this disciple? Most scholars and theologians say it is John himself, written anonymously into his own narrative. However, there is a small number of contrarian scholars and theologians who say it just might be ... Lazarus. It's an interesting idea! First, the term "disciple" is used throughout the Gospels for all those who followed Jesus' teaching, not just for the main twelve. We also see in John's Gospel that the raising of Lazarus receives the fullest treatment of all the miracles. And the author makes an express point of saying that Jesus **loved** Lazarus (*as well as Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha*), something not specifically said about anyone else in any of the gospels. Jesus performed the most spectacular and dramatic of His miracles by restoring this beloved friend Lazarus to life after he had been in the tomb four days.

If Lazarus is indeed the "beloved disciple" here at the cross, this might account for his boldness. After all, what's the worst the authorities can do to him? Kill him? Well, he's **been** dead. *"Been there, done that!"* Lazarus might have said. It's kind of hard to frighten a dead man! What's more, who can better attest to Jesus' power over death than one who was raised from the dead by Jesus?

Second, **HOPE**. Biblically speaking, hope is so much more than just a wistful desire; hope is a **confidence**, a sure expectation. Let's now look at the mother of Jesus; I believe she exemplifies **Hope**. Perhaps this is reading between the lines, but there is something significant in what the Bible does not say. Note that Mary is not wailing, she is not tearing at her clothes, nor wringing her hands, beating her breasts, tearing at her hair, all of which are customary practices for mourners at the time. Nowhere do we read that Mary displays the customary actions of grief and mourning. Rather, Mary appears **composed**.

Put yourself in her shoes (or sandals) for a minute. She could be thinking many things, such as why couldn't her son have led a normal, quiet life? Marry a nice Jewish girl and settle down? She was his mother, after all! Insults hurled at Him, she certainly felt. She felt to a large measure the pain He felt. She knew Him perhaps better than anyone there; He had been with her for over thirty years. Yet, her son was also her Lord (*often children try to lord it over their parents, but this is one case where it is justified!*)

Though it may have been difficult for Mary to comprehend, perhaps she understood somehow that this was not the end. A mother knows things about her child that sometimes her own child doesn't even know, and I'm confident Mary knew that **SOMETHING** was going to happen a few days later. After all, she was the *"Theotokos,"* the bearer of God; she raised Him! More than likely she had utmost confidence that He would do what He said He would do ... He would be back. In the face of death, in the face of apparent loss, her hope gave her composure, made her strong, her hope helped keep her calm. So, hope abides at the foot of the cross in the person of Mary.

Finally, **LOVE**. One of Jesus' final acts on the cross is a loving act; He provides for His mother. He is not so caught up in His own pain and suffering to the point of being self-absorbed and oblivious to the needs of others. He is not so caught up in His own pain and suffering as to forget the needs of His dear mother.

Note, too, that He calls her "Woman," which may sound a little bit harsh ... He doesn't call her "Mother" or "Mom;" it's "Woman." Well, it might just be His way of gently and lovingly reminding her He was someone other than her son ... He **was** her Lord and her God. In calling her "woman" instead of "mother," He is gently and lovingly reminding her that He is more than just her son; He is most likely gently and lovingly reinforcing her hope and her confidence. One of the most loving things anyone can do, especially in the face of grief, is to remind people of the reality of hope in Jesus Christ. One of the most loving things anyone can do in the face of any difficulty is to remind people just who Jesus is. And this is what Jesus does for His mother, as He provides for her care.

The greatest act of love at the cross, however, was not for Jesus' mother alone ... although it certainly included her. Jesus greatest act of love was for us all. As Paul writes in Romans, the greatest demonstration of the love of God is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

At the cross of Jesus Christ, these three abide ... faith, hope and love.

And the **greatest** of these ... is love.