"Woman, ..." -- John 19:26-27

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
14 March Anno Domini 2001
Wednesday Vespers
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

"Yet Thou art He Who took Me from the womb;
Thou didst keep Me safe upon My mother's breasts." Psalm 22:24

Dear Baptized,

The beloved physician's "narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1) informs us that after the shepherds "made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child," that "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:17 & 19). Likewise, when the twelve-year-old Jesus said to her, "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?" that "His mother kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:49 & 51). Also there is no doubt that, as the years passed and Jesus "increased in wisdom and in stature," (Luke 2:52) Mary kept in the back of her mind the prophetic words of Simeon. While both Mary and Joseph heard the blessing, Simeon specifically said to Mary, "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Certainly Mary thought for hours and days and years on her firstborn Son Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and Who is the Son of the Most High.

Indeed, "The Lutheran Confessions" proclaim the Divinity of Jesus and that "He had this majesty immediately at His conception even in His mother's womb." "Mary, the most blessed virgin, did not conceive a mere, ordinary human being, but a human being who is truly the Son of the most high God. ... Therefore she is truly the mother of God." (FC SD viii). A poet has declared the same truth in different words ...

"Blue homespun and the bend of my breast
keep warm this small hot naked star
fallen to my arms. (Rest ...
you who have had so far
to come.) Now nearness satisfies
the body of God sweetly. Quiet he lies
whose vigor hurled
a universe. He sleeps
whose eyelids have not closed before."
(Luci Shaw, *Mary's song*)

But, dear baptized, what of that last time when He would close His eyelids in the sleep of this world? Yes, we are now at the cross of Jesus once again and we are not alone. There are two criminals - one at Christ's right hand and one at His left. The centurion and the soldiers are on duty and are killing time. The religious leaders are gloating and glowering for they have opposed the Gospel from the

beginning and sought to dispose of Jesus for many months. "There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee" (Matthew 27:55). As for the number of spectators, well, God knows. There are two more there at Golgotha - two standing near the cross and near one another - Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Under the theme of "Woman, ..." please listen to John 19:26-27, the sermon text for this evening ...

"When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

There is likely no more compassionate, tender or heart-moving words written in the history of the world or heard by the ears of man than John 19:26-27. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God and Redeemer of all, is crucified and from His vantage point beholds the world below Him. Jesus, Man of the substance of His mother, looks down from the cursed cross and sees His mother. While in her womb, her blood carried nutrients to His Blood that would be shed for the remission of sin, her sin included. While in her arms, her milk fed His Body that would be broken for the life of the world, her life included. Jesus, Who has always known all things, learned what a mother's love was. At her voice, He heard His Word. At her hymning, He learned His Liturgy. Ahh yes, those cherished days when the boy Jesus lifted up His eyes and looked into His mother's eyes.

On the Friday before that One Passover, at The Place of the Skull, it is Mary who lifts up her tear-filled, stunned eyes and looks into her Son's eyes. "When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!'"

Woman!? Upon first hearing it, "woman" seems wrong, or at least not quite right. Why did Jesus say "to His mother, ‘Woman'"? We might come up with several reasons if we thought about it. First, Jesus might be sparing her further torment by calling her "mother." If that doesn't seem plausible, imagine what it would have done to her if Jesus had called out to her with the word "mama." A second proposal is an extension of the first, that Jesus, in order to spare her any more anguish, distanced himself from His mother by calling her "woman." However, given the Biblical record regarding the conduct of our Lord and the context of these verses, it seems unlikely that Divine distancing is the reason.

A third reason proffered is that "woman" was a common manner of address that men in that culture used of women - mothers, grown sisters and adult daughters included. After all, according to this line of thought, when Mary came to her grown Son at the wedding in Cana with the report of the lack of wine, "Jesus said to her, ‘O woman, what have you to do with Me?' My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). Here in Cana in Galilee, with "this, the first of His signs," (John 2:11) we have what appears to be the reason, but it is not the cultural reason. It is something else for you remember that "Jesus, when He began His ministry, was about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). Well, from this point Jesus is more noticeably His mother's Savior and Lord and Redeemer. Mary is now a disciple and member of the congregation in which her Son, Jesus, is the Head. Thus did this Man leave his foster-father and mother and cleave to His Bride, the Church.

That is particularly true on the cross where we find Jesus about His Father's business, not His

mother's business. This is not a putdown whatsoever. Jesus is doing the will of the One Who sent Him; specifically to be and to open the Way to Paradise for the world and that includes the woman named Mary - the woman who served as the temple of God for nine months - the mother of Jesus.

"When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!'" Woman, standing near you is John, the disciple whom I love. Woman, hear Me, He is your son. He is family. He is one of yours. Consider him to be My brother. Earlier Jesus stretched out His hand toward His disciples and "said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers'" (Matthew 12:49). Herein is the Church. The LORD "has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God" (Large Catechism). Do you not behold the Church at the foot of the cross? With His hands stretched out in the Offering of the ages, "Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!'" John is your son, My brother and a member of our Family. He is one of My gifts to you and is there in My stead.

"Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!'" Dear brother, this woman is now your mother. Take heed to yourself and to Her, in which I have made you a guardian, to provide for Her all that she needs and is good for Her in body, soul and spirit. Give Her water and the Daily Bread. She is in your care and you are called to remind Her of My Word in the up-coming days and then in those years when She is older than this is at this time. "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

The meaning of this is not that John escorted Mary from the site of the crucifixion at that very instant, but rather, from that moment on he was to care for her and that meant being at her side and encouraging, caring and supporting her. Thus this immediately called undershepherd stayed with her at the foot of the cross that She might behold Her Savior as they all looked forward to the Day of Resurrection even as Mary and her Son looked into each other's eyes on Good Friday when Jesus said, "Woman, behold, thy son" and Mary held her Peace. Amen.

"Older than eternity, now he
is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed
to my poor planet, caught that I might be free,
blind in my womb to know my darkness ended,
brought to this birth
for me to be new-born,
and for him to see me mended
I must see him torn." Amen.
(Luci Shaw, *Mary's song*)