

# **Behold Your Mother... Behold Your Son**

**I have never really been comfortable with giving family names to people who** aren't actually family. When I was in high school, I had a circle of friends that all called one of my friend's moms "Mom." I called her by her name. One day she told me, "You know that you can just call me 'Mom,' right?" And I just said, "Umm...no. I have a mom." A friend of mine from seminary was called "Mom" when she was in college, because she took care of so many underclassmen who needed a little help to get their lives in order. And that's great and all; it's a wonderful witness to her faith and a great way to live into her spiritual gifts. But all those college girls actually had moms; my friend was just being a good friend. My best friend has two sons, and I know them quite well. I babysat both of them a couple of times when they were younger; I've been to a few of their birthday parties. But they don't call me "Uncle Clay." Family names, at least in my world, are reserved for people who are actually family.

Except for when it comes to you all. Every week I stand before you and say that it's good to be together as the family of God. When we share the life of our congregation together, I ask if there are ways that we can be your church family today. I refer to you and invite you to refer to each other as brothers and sisters in faith. We sing it in hymns, recite it in prayers, and maybe just maybe feel it in our spirits that this gathering with this group of people is really is our family.

**Jesus redefined family in our scripture for this morning. Jesus used family names** for those who were not actually family today without any of the qualms I have about the practice. Jesus, on the cross, witnesses his mother and beloved disciple, in their bereavement and entrust them to each other's care. In the midst of the pain and humiliation of the cross, Jesus' concern isn't for what he's experiencing, for the nails in

his arms or the thorns in his brow. His concern isn't for the piercing words of the crowds, the lies and hate that are being spewed, or the fact that he is going to die.

His concern is for his mother. His concern was for this woman weeping at the foot of the cross. This makes sense when we think that Jesus' brothers have abandoned him earlier in John's gospel, and the absence of Joseph in the story makes us suspect that Mary is alone. She has supported Jesus all along, and now with his death, a woman in her culture would be bereft and at risk. The Beloved Disciple is being called now to take Mary into his family, and he does this obediently.

His concern is for his disciples, namely the Beloved Disciple who didn't scatter along with the rest of the disciples. After his arrest, many of the disciples did scatter, but not John, the Beloved Disciple. He watched from afar and then was present with Mary and the other women at the foot of the cross. And with compassion and care and love in his eyes, Jesus looks on his disciple, anticipates his mourning, the mourning of all his disciples, and gives him a new mission and purpose.

**At the foot of the cross, Jesus creates a new family, not born of blood but bonded** together by the blood of Jesus Christ. "Behold your mother. Behold your son." Unsurprisingly, they took these words to heart. Jesus asked John to care for his mother, and he asked his mother to accept John's protection and care. According to one tradition in the church, Mary lived out her days with John in the town of Ephesus on the west coast of what is now Turkey.

The interesting thing to me is that this is not the first instance in the gospel of Jesus redefining family in the gospels. Very early in Jesus' ministry, the crowd informs Jesus that his mother and brothers have come to him after he's done a series of healings.

The crowds and his own family are pretty convinced that Jesus is crazy or demon possessed, but none of that is true. As we talked about last week, Jesus is on a mission, following the call God placed on his life, a mission to seek and save those who were lost. His family has come to claim him, to pull him away, to lessen the embarrassment of having a crazy person in their family. But Jesus isn't having it. Jesus knows that he's doing the will of his father and living his mission. So he says, "The ones who are doing my will are my family, my mother, brothers, and sisters."

These words from Jesus in his ministry and from the cross remind us that in His name, new bonds are established--bonds that could be called family ties, but that go beyond the natural links within a family. The same Jesus who turned his disciples into a community and turns Mary and John into mother and son has turned us all into brothers and sisters.

I call us the family of God because that is exactly who we are. Through baptism we are grafted into this one family, into this one body of which we are all members--sisters and brothers. Look around you. Behold the person on your left, on your right, and the person across the sanctuary from you. They are our family, not because we like them or because we get along well, but because they too are part of the family of God. Sometimes, in an earthly family, some members dislike others. I may not like a particular cousin or be a little bit distant with an aunt from time to time., but they are family. We did not choose them. We had no say about whether or not they would be part of our family. But they are, and we cannot change that. This is how the family of God works, too. We may not always like each other. We may not always agree. But we are still

a family. Brought together in the name of the one who saw Mary and John in the depth of their pain and said, “Behold your mother, behold your son.”

Bishop William Willimon, before he was bishop of the North Alabama Conference, was dean of the chapel at Duke University. Upon his consecration as bishop and appointment to North Alabama, someone asked him what he missed most about being at Duke. His answer was the Duke Admissions Department. They’re very selective and only choose the best of the best. That isn’t the case for the church. Willimon says that in the church, we have to work with whoever shows up.

And that’s the truth. And it’s a beautiful thing. And not only do we as the family of God have to work with whoever shows up, we get to love whoever shows up. We get to embrace them as family. Just by walking in the door today, you are already a part of something bigger than yourself. You are a vital part of the family of God. We want to know how to mourn with you, celebrate with you, and come alongside of you so that we can all follow in Jesus’ words and be his true kindred who do the will of God in the world. Behold your sister. Behold your brother. Behold the family of God. Amen.