LENT 2016
“THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST”
“Dear woman, here is your son.” John 19:26
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I encourage you to listen as I read some excerpts from the Gospels about Jesus’ suffering...

Then [Pilate] released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. Matthew 27:26-31

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophesy! Who hit you?” And they said many other insulting things to him. Luke 22:64 & 65

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!” In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. Mark 15:25-32

Each of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—write graphically about Jesus’ experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, at his trial and on the cross. Have you ever wondered, why the Gospel writers go to such great lengths to portray Jesus’ pain and suffering?

My answer to that question is the heart of today’s sermon, so I don’t want to answer it just yet, but suffice it to say that Jesus’ suffering is important for us. Jesus’ death on the cross was filled with pain for Him and its remembrance stirs up sorrow within us as we reflect on what our Savior endured, but the message of Jesus’ cross is joy and hope and victory. Listen to this quote from Steven James:

“If the cross was the end of the story, we would have no hope. But the cross isn’t the end. Jesus didn't escape from death; he conquered it and opened the way to heaven for all who will dare to believe.”
Steven James
As we sing about Jesus’ cross, I encourage you to focus on the sacrifice He made for us, but I also want you to recognize that hope and freedom and victory is ours through the cross.

John 19:16-18 & 25-27
Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

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.

During our Lenten series we’re examining the last words Jesus spoke on the cross, believing that these statements are important for us in understanding what Jesus’ sacrifice means for us. Today we’re looking at the third statement Jesus made from the cross, which is found in John’s Gospel chapter 19 verse 26. Jesus said, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” As He was being crucified Jesus spoke to his mother Mary, telling her that his disciple John—the one known as ”the disciple whom Jesus loved”—would take care of her as if he were her son. In the midst of his deep suffering Jesus remembered his mother and did what He could to ensure that she’d be cared for after his death.

The statements of Jesus which we looked at the past two weeks: “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.” and “Today you will be with me in paradise” were great starting points to talk about forgiveness and salvation—the essence of the cross—but what are we to make of this statement that Jesus spoke from the cross to his mother? It doesn’t appear to be highly theological or to have significant implications for us—it’s just a dying son making sure that his mother is cared for after He’s gone. Jesus’ statement highlights the fact that He was a son who had parents—history tells us that his father Joseph died while Jesus was growing up. But at a more basic level, when we read Jesus’ words to his mother we’re reminded that He was one of us us—a human being. I want to return to the question I posed during the introduction earlier, “Why do the Gospel writers go to such great lengths to portray Jesus’ pain and suffering?” There are multiple possible answers to this question, but my quick answer is that the Gospel writers wanted to emphasize Jesus’ humanity and what better way
could they do that than by emphasizing the physical suffering Jesus walked through during his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

The Bible, unlike other religion’s texts, and Christianity, unlike other religions, places a high value on the natural world. Most religions explain the natural away, dismissing it as unimportant when compared with spirituality. But Christianity emphasizes the natural and the spiritual. Much of the Apostle Paul’s writing in the New Testament argues for the importance of the natural, in the face of heresies which claimed, “Spirituality is what really matters, so it doesn’t matter what we do with our bodies.” And nowhere is Christianity’s emphasis on the natural and the spiritual more clearly seen than in the person of Jesus.

I’m going to try not to get too complex here, but the issue of Jesus’ nature—was He human or was He divine—was the major point of contention in the early Church for the first 3 centuries after Jesus’ death. One faction within the Church claimed that Jesus was divine and He only seemed to be human—that throughout his life people were deceived thinking He was one of them. Another group rejected Jesus’ divinity and claimed He was a great man who was able to fabricate healings and miracles and whose disciples perpetuated the myth of his resurrection. And a variety of other ideas, which were later understood to be heresies, claimed variations of these beliefs. It wasn’t until 325 A.D. at a church gathering known as the Council of Nicaea that Jesus’ identity as fully God and fully human was established as the only true belief. And also during the 4th Century the Apostles’ Creed was officially established as the statement of Christian belief, and the foremost idea in the creed is the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let’s declare the truth of the Apostles’ Creed together aloud...

The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Bible emphasizes the importance of Jesus’ humanity throughout the New Testament and the implications his humanity has for us, but nowhere is it explained more clearly and powerfully than in the Book of Hebrews, whose author refers to Jesus as our great high priest. Priests were established by God in the Old Testament as intermediaries between a holy God and sinful human beings. The priests communicated and taught God’s law to the people and they offered sacrifices on behalf of the people to God. The ministry of the priests was at the heart of the Jewish religious, but their ministry was incomplete, because no matter how many sacrifices they performed or offerings they made and no matter how passionately they taught, people continued to be enslaved by sin and death.

And then God sent Jesus. Like a priest, Jesus taught God’s ways to the people. Like a priest, Jesus taught people to pray to God. But unlike the priests, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect, once for all sacrifice that cleared the way for people to be freed from sin and death and to walk in relationship with God. Jesus was our Heavenly Father’s ultimate expression of love. I like how Philip Yancey explains that Jesus on the cross is the ultimate message of God’s love for us,

“To some, the image of a pale body glimmering on a dark night whispers of defeat. What good is a God who does not control his Son’s suffering? But another sound can be heard: the shout of a God crying out to human beings, "I LOVE YOU."

Love was compressed for all history in that lonely figure on the cross.”

Philip Yancey

The cross may not make sense to many people, but it is the supreme act of God’s love for his children. Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to die for our sins and Jesus’ death on the cross changed everything. Follow along as I read these Scriptures from Hebrews and pay special attention to the bold portions which emphasize Jesus’ humanity and to the underlined portions, which spell out the implications Jesus’ sacrifice has for us.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16
Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. **Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.** For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. Hebrews 7:26-28

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:12-15

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:19-23

**In his humanity...**

- Jesus can sympathize with our weakness because He has been tempted as we have.

- Jesus offered his own body and shed his own blood as a perfect sacrifice for us.

**Based on Jesus’ sacrifice of his life...**

- We can approach God’s throne with confidence and receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. He meets every need we have.

- Our consciences are cleansed from sin, so that we may serve God!

- We can draw near to God in faith, being cleansed of our guilty conscience and holding firm in hope and faith that He is faithful.

Jesus’ humanity isn’t peripheral to our faith. It’s the core of what we believe. It’s Jesus’ humanity that opened the door for us to walk into God’s presence, being forgiven of our sins, cleansed from our unrighteousness and empowered by his Holy Spirit to live for God.
So what’s our response to Jesus’ sacrifice? As our response I’d like us to reflect on this question, **Are you and I walking in the victory that is available to us through Jesus’ perfect sacrifice of his own life?**

In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is excellence of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of holiness. There is no salvation of soul, nor hope of eternal life, save in the Cross.” Thomas a Kempis