

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla; February 28, 2004

Midweek Lenten Series 2024 "Guided to the Cross"

Sermon Text: John 19:26-27

Sermon Title Theme: "Guided to LOVE"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A young man who had been away from home for several years received word that his father was critically ill. Guilt-ridden, because he had not had contact with his father for months, he boarded the first plane and headed home. He was determined, at the last moment, to make up for his neglect and to assure the dying man of his sincere affection.

To his dismay he arrived just an hour too late. There would be no last dialog or the reconciliation he so earnestly desired. If only he could know how his father felt toward him in his dying moments.

The next morning his sister handed him a letter that his father had written a few days earlier but had not mailed. The young man's eyes filled with tears as he eagerly read each line. His father bore no ill will. He still loved him, as he had down through the years. The letter was signed, "With 'love', your Father."

In the agony of the cross, Jesus sends a message to those He loved. To His mother, Jesus says "Woman, behold your son!" Little is said in Scripture about Jesus' relationship with His mother during His ministry. In Bethlehem's barn Mary ponders the miracle that God had brought into the world through her. We read of Mary's concern for her "missing" 12 year-old Son who was about His Father's business in the temple. We read of her attendance with Him at the wedding

in Cana and her awareness of her Son's miraculous power, "Do whatever he tells you." Years later, Mary is now beneath the cross of her dying Son and in His love for her, He arranges for her earthly care.

To disciple John, Jesus says, "Behold your mother." Disciple John is known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The disciple called to leave his nets and become a "fisher of men" had been with Jesus for three years. He had seen His miracles and heard His teaching. John had personally seen the divine nature of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. John had been in the Garden of Gethsemane hearing Jesus' prayers and watching His arrest. Of all the disciples, John alone was at the cross with the Master whom He loved. John loved by Jesus, is to live and share a loving family relationship with Mary.

John and Mary were not perfect in their love for Jesus. They too were sinners. Mary could not and would not understand the mission of her Son. John wanted to be part of a grand earthly kingdom he hoped Jesus would bring. John would fall asleep as Jesus prayed in agony.

Jesus' love for Mary and John was more than the love of a family member or close friend. In the culture of Jesus' time, that kind of love was known in the Greek language as a "Phileo" love—the love of brother to brother or friend to friend. Jesus' love was an "agape" love. It was the love of complete sacrifice.

That kind of love is described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:7-8, "One will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." John, loved by Jesus from the cross, shares the message of God's love in his letters to the early church, "In this the love of

God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world. . . .In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the complete payment for our sins,” (I John 4:9-10)

Through the cross, the love of God goes beyond Mary and John to the world and to each of us. The Sunday school teacher had ended her Bible story and was asking questions of her primary tots. “Why do you think, God loves us all so very much?” she asked.

The children thought hard. Suddenly little Kristen’s hand shot up. Without the slightest doubt about the correctness of her answer she blurted: “Because He has only one of each of us.”

How true! Yes, “God loved the world so that He gave His only Son;” but that love is personalized as our name is called in Holy Baptism; as the words “Given and shed for YOU for the forgiveness of sins” are spoken at His table; as the words of absolution are spoken collectively, yet individually, “I assure YOU that all your sins are forgiven.” It’s as if each one of us were beneath the cross of Jesus with His words of love spoken to us and His cleansing blood flowing from His wounds to wash away all of our sins.

The word of John 3:16 (Gospel in a nut shell) are sometimes individualized by substituting individual names for “world” and “whosoever”. God so loved _____ that He gave His only Son, that as _____ believes in Him, _____ will not perish, and _____ will have eternal life. (Repeat having worshippers insert their name.)

We are guided to the cross this Lenten season to see Jesus’ sacrificial love for us. Through the cross and from the cross we are guided to love as Jesus’ loved. John who witnessed Jesus love

for him and for the world also wrote to the early church, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another," (1 John 4).

God places us in a variety of contexts to love as He loved: love of spouse; love of parent or child; love for friends, neighbors; even love for our enemies.

Fred had a neighbor that was hard to love: his personality was tiresome and troublesome; his property was a mess; his words were sometimes crude and harsh; his actions were self-serving. "What do I do?" Fred asked of a fellow church member.

Do what Jesus did, "Love him to death," was the answer." That's what Jesus did. He loved John, Mary, the repentant thief, the Roman soldiers, and you and me "to death."

May we be guided to the cross to do the same! In Jesus' loving name. Amen.