

Bruton Parish Episcopal Church  
Good Friday  
The Rev'd Dr. Daniel W. McClain  
April 20, 2019

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

A couple years ago, when I was but a lowly postulant, the assistant bishop of Maryland advised me that I would be preaching the Good Friday sermon at the parish at which I was an intern.

Now, by this time I had preached maybe half a dozen times. But in my mind, hearing that I would be preaching the Good Friday service was like hearing that a single A rookie would be starting pitcher for the first game of the World Series.

Once I got over my anxiety, however, I was surprised to learn that that Good Friday coincided with the Feast of the Annunciation before it was transferred. The day we celebrate the faithfulness of Mary of Nazareth and the conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit coincided with the day on which Jesus' life ended.

Beholding this juxtaposition was breathtaking. And what it caused me to do for perhaps the first time was to hear today's gospel reading in a new way.

See, I had grown up dwelling on the suffering of Christ on the cross. And I suppose it's only natural that our attention is drawn to Jesus' death. It's staggering.

And yet, in the middle of the reading, as Jesus' only belongings are confiscated and divided by the soldiers, Jesus sees his mother and the disciple, John, and recognizes her suffering, her need.

Imagine for a moment Mary's pain. The birth of this man was announced to her by the angel Gabriel. And the ensuing months of her life must have been filled with a bittersweet combination of anxiety and expectation, as she struggled to explain, or not explain, the circumstances of her pregnancy to friends and neighbors, and her fiancée. This pregnancy disrupted and reordered her entire life, just as he would distrust and reorder the whole world.

And this man's birth was hailed by angels, shepherds, and exotic visitors from another land. His birth forced this young family to leave their country and seek shelter abroad, just as Christians would often have to flee persecution, suffer imprisonment, and at times death because they followed Jesus.

What little we know about Jesus' childhood suggests that he was precocious. Jesus must have been a source of pride and frustration to his mother. Being a mother is no doubt challenging and time consuming enough. But being the

theotokos, the mother of God incarnate, certainly brought challenges and surprises that could hardly have been anticipated by anyone.

And here is her boy, this child with whom she had spent her entire adult life, this child who had no doubt captured her heart, in whom she and others had placed so much hope, this boy who grew into a great teacher, and must have brought her so much joy, now nailed to a cross.

Mary's situation is so unique, so heartbreaking, and yet, I think there is a lot that applies to us.

So much of the life of a Christian is like the life of Mary. We receive Jesus in an act of Marian faith - we say "yes" - and by a work of the Holy Spirit, who cooperates with our "yes."

We carry Jesus in our hearts and into the world.

We foster our relationship with Jesus as if caring for a small child, a child that grows and is at times endearing and unpredictable. We spend time with Jesus.

Like Mary beholding her son, our relationship with Christ brings us both great joy, surprising joy that we could not have planned on, as well as great pain, pain that while unwelcome is also a pain that we see first in the figure of Jesus' mother.

Mary is often seen as a type or exemplar of the Church. When Jesus gives Mary, his mother, to John, his disciple, Christians see in this an instruction to John to care for the Church. And sometimes mosaics and icons from the early church depict Mary in the center of the disciples, with her hands outstretched in a position of prayer and authority. Mary is not just a nice image for devotion; Mary is the first to say yes to the Incarnation, and keeps saying yes all the way to Golgotha. And by doing so, Mary participates in the creation of the Church. The Woman, Mary of Nazareth, who could have said no, who could have asserted her ego and her freedom to determine herself and her own future, instead said "Let it be according to the Lord's will." And by doing so, Mary invited upon herself a future both wonderful and terrible.

Mary bore Christ, not just through pain of pregnancy and the challenges of raising a child, but in the fullness of motherhood - in the great anguish of losing her child.

Tonight, let us meditate not only the human pain that Christ bore for our sakes, but also on the grief and pain that his mother bore. Let us learn from her example how we too can say "yes" to Jesus, how we can bear Christ to the world, in joy and pain.