

The Cross: Week 3

Lydia Shiu | Daily Bible Guide | 2020

Monday, March 9

John 19:16-27

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." ²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,

and for my clothing they cast lots."

²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Points of Interest

- Of The Seven Last Words of Jesus, this week's word is, "Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother."
- In the rest of the Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) the women are looking from afar, but only in John they are close enough that they can hear Jesus' voice.
- With his last few breaths, Jesus tended and cared for his loved ones. He makes adoption arrangements. As if he wasn't already doing enough with eternal things. He chooses to make sure that his mother is taken care of. That his beloved disciple is connected. He sees to it that he meets their familial needs that would impact their well being, emotionally and economically. Jesus cares not only for our souls but for our loneliness, our earthly needs, support and connection in times of grief and loss. I find this Jesus not only holy and mighty, but also sweet. Sweet Jesus, who offers to us a mother. Sweet Jesus who offers to us a new family through him.
- In John, the 'beloved disciple' is never named. The only identifier to this disciple is one "whom (Jesus) loved". Many think that it is John. While others find themselves as the beloved disciple, a literary device John used to bring us into the story. If you were standing at the foot of the cross, what might you be feeling at this moment? What would you have needed? What would you have wanted?

A Direction for Prayer

Think of any of your friends and family who are alone or disconnected from family. Pray for those who feel like orphans, grieving the loss of close family members, suffering from the pain of loneliness. Pray that God may bring to them a new family that might be able to be a presence of intimacy and acceptance.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Radical Adoption - This week, imagine yourself as one who is radically adopted and fully accepted by God. Here is your Father. Here is your Mother. When Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his ministry, the heavens were torn open and a voice came down saying, "You are my beloved. In whom I am well pleased." Imagine this being said upon you by God, again and again. That no matter what you're going through, what losses you grieve, what loneliness you feel--God loves you and adopts you into the family of God. What would it look like to fully accept and embrace that truth?

Tuesday, March 10

Today's poem is a sonnet by Marily Nelson, from her book [A Wreath for Emmett Till](#). The poem, and a photo of Nelson can be found online here:

<https://womensvoicesforchange.org/poetry-sunday-three-sonnets-from-a-wreath-for-emmett-till-by-marilyn-nelson.htm>

Your only child, a body thrown to bloat,
mother of sorrows, of justice denied.
Surely you must have thought of suicide,
seeing his gray flesh, chains around his throat.
Surely you didn't know you would devote
the rest of your changed life to dignified
public remembrance of how Emmett died,
innocence slaughtered by the hands of hate.
If sudden loving light proclaimed you blest
would you bow your head in humility,
your healed heart overflow with gratitude?
Would you say yes, like the mother of Christ?
Or would you say no to your destiny,
mother of a boy martyr, if you could?

Points of Interest

- Poet Marilyn Nelson compares the experience of the mother of Emmett Till to the mother of Jesus. Emmett Till was a 14 year old boy who was lynched in 1955.
- In line with theologian James Cone, the author of 'The Cross and the Lynching Tree', this comparison is in one sense provocative, and another sense difficult to not see. "Mother of sorrows, of justice denied" and "innocence slaughtered by the hands of hate" bring to life the trauma of the mother who has to see her own son die an unjust death.
- This poem is written in the form of a heroic crown of sonnets. In her introduction to *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, Nelson writes, "When I decided to use this form, I had seen only one heroic crown of sonnets, a fantastically beautiful poem by the Danish poet Inger Christensen. Instead of thinking too much about the painful subject of lynching, I thought about what Inger Christensen's strategy must have been. The strict form became a kind of insulation, a way of protecting myself from the intense pain of the subject matter, and a way to allow the Muse to determine what the poem would say."

- Like Nelson, the cross is sometimes too painful to face for us. I have had the cross in my mind generally as a symbol of glory. And yet it is both death and glory. The mother of Jesus holds up both her deep sorrow and dignity of her son Jesus. And the mother of Emmett Till, in this poem, is raised to also hold both her tragic pain and see herself to be “blest”. Both. It causes me to wonder, how can I see the deep sufferings of the world, with the strength of a mother. One who feels the deep pains of labor and births out a new life through it.

A Direction for Prayer

Think of all the mothers who have had to lose their child to unjust violence. Pray not only for their sorrows but their resilience and strength. Pray for God’s anointing upon them. And for all those who died a tragic death, may they rise in glory with Jesus. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

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Wednesday, March 11

Romans 8:14-25

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Points of Interest

- Theology of adoption is a powerful metaphor for our relationship with God. The concept is weaved throughout the Bible, inviting the people of God to embrace and connect intimately across familial and even ethnic lines. Even Jesus is legitimized in the Davidic lineage through adoption by Joseph. Digging deeper into the symbolism of adoption and its meaning can redefine, expand, and solidify our understanding of how we relate to God and how God relates to us.
- There's a story I've heard of President John F. Kennedy's toddler daughter playing about at his feet and under the desk in the Oval Office during a meeting. I don't know how accurate it is, but it reminds me of the ways I'd have direct access to my dad whether he was in a board meeting or in my parents' bedroom. I had freedom and my dad's space was my playground. What does it mean to be the children of God? That we're given the freedom to be God's beloved, simply to be adored and watched with delight.

- God's parental relationship with us is a beautiful illustration of God's love for us. In Psalms and Isaiah, God is described as one who comforts like a mother comforting a child, and nursed and carried on her side. It's one of close tenderness and vulnerable intimacy. Seeing God as a parent brings a new light that adds to other symbols like the Lord, Savior, or Teacher. God is a Parent, a Father and a Mother, who adopted us eagerly into the loving care of God.
- Verse 17 says, "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ". So then, Paul is saying that since we are children, we are heirs. What does it mean to be an heir? All of God's inheritance is ours. And what does it mean to be joint heirs with Christ? All that is Christ's is ours. The access to divine moves from religious to familial. It moves from systemic to personal. That means, God is safe. And we are safe in God's loving arms.

A Direction for Prayer

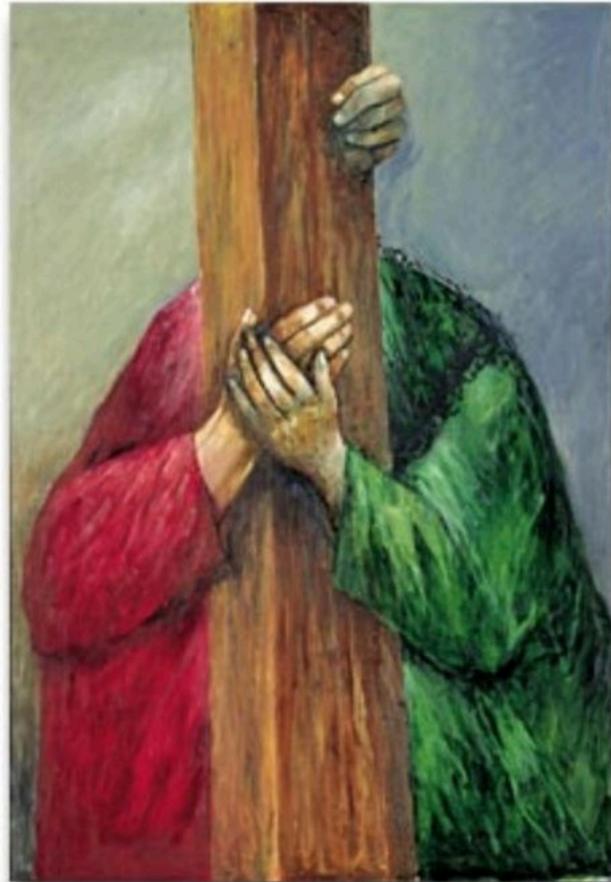
Pray for all those who have been adopted, in foster care, and the parents that adopt and care for them. Pray for those who have no family members or have been estranged from loved ones. Pray for strained family relationships and those who have suffered abuse from close family members. Pray that the perfect parental love of God may cover us all. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Radical Adoption - This week, imagine yourself as one who is radically adopted and fully accepted by God. Here is your Father. Here is your Mother. When Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his ministry, the heavens were torn open and a voice came down saying, "You are my beloved. In whom I am well pleased." Imagine this being said upon you by God, again and again. Say it out loud to yourself. That no matter what you're going through, what losses you grieve, what loneliness you feel--God loves you and adopts you into the family of God. What would it look like to fully accept and embrace that truth?

Thursday, March 12

The short poem below by Padraig O'Tuama and the related painting by Sieger Koder can be found online (<http://www.padraigotuama.com/news/stationsofthecross>) and in the book *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*.



Mary, Mother of Failure,

Where we do not understand

we can hope to know

that we are loved.

Pray for us to have the grace to know

our own stories of failure,

because much was kept from you,

but we know that you were loved.

Amen.

Points of Interest

- Religious history has so elevated the mother of Jesus that we sometimes forget how devastating it must have felt for her to see her son die a gruesome undignified death. It must have felt like a failure at that point. She might've questioned the original promise of the angel Gabriel to her. That's okay. That is a part of the story.
- Remembering the human aspects, not just the glory, of Jesus on the cross can help us relate to him and identify with him in our worldly sufferings. What we know in hindsight, we don't know in the moment. In the moment, it might feel as though everything is coming to an end. There at the foot of Jesus, much was kept from Mary as well. In the midst of suffering that seems to have no end in sight, things can be confusing and nothing makes sense. There, Jesus loved Mary. There, God loves us.
- Theologian Oswald Chambers said, "What seemed to be failure from man's standpoint was a triumph from God's standpoint." The death on the cross looked like failure to Mary, to Jesus' disciples, to Jesus' opponents. But it was the glory moment of God's greatest display of love. In moments of our own failures, may we see God's love for us displayed extravagantly and abundantly.

A Direction for Prayer

Is there an area of your life that feels like failure? A place where you're not sure what God is exactly doing? Pray for peace beyond understanding. Pray for illumination in the midst of the darkness. In the unknown, pray that God will show up with bold love that you cannot deny.

Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

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Friday, March 13

Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Points of Interest

- Paul's language forces and reinforces the unity and the likeness of us with Christ. He uses the words, "in Christ" about 9 times in this short text, and the rest of his letters in the Bible are full of them (about 83, excluding similar phrases like 'in him'). His intention is to express the togetherness and oneness of us with Christ, that is not just relational but mystical and supernatural. He tries to describe them with words, which is hard, and so he reiterates and builds long sentences with comma after comma to portray his point.
- The language of adoption, inheritance, and family helps Paul present our eternal boundedness with Jesus. Elsewhere, he uses other language like the body of Christ or the ever-presence of the Spirit in us. Paul means to connect us to Jesus in all the ways, now and forever.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is also a guide and power that Paul tries to instill in his readers. Shared experience of the Spirit is what binds us to one another. The Greek word *pneuma* has been understood as "the heavenly sphere or its substance" and also has meanings of "functional", "material", and "anthropological". I share this because I find this fascinating, and also because Spirit has been a bit of a mystery to me. So what Paul is saying is, how is Jesus at work in us? Through all the ways. Through family. Through our world, functionally and materially. Through our anthropology. Through the Holy Spirit that brings us all in and at the same time is outpoured on us. In him, through him, with him.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for an intimate connection with Jesus that binds us stronger than anything else in this world. Pray for the Spirit of God to expand beyond yourself, connecting you to others in miraculous and generative ways. Pray for the full encompassing experience of the uniting power of *pneuma* that breathes through all, blows where it will, giving new life and new relationships to wherever God leads. May God's breath fill us with Godself. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

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