

Responding to Those You Love

Today we are continuing with a sermon series on the seven last words of Christ as He hung on the Cross. The series will take us up to Easter. In today's sermon Jesus addresses His mother.

Listen to the word of God

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

(NIV John 19:25–27)

Jesus is concerned about His mother, in spite of the situation that He finds Himself in. He knows what is going to happen to Him. He knows that there is just one way down from the cross. He knows too what will happen to Mary if she is not cared for. A single woman in that time needed a husband or son to take care of her. Without then, she would become part of lowest classes in that society. Being alone would have been very bad for Mary. Despite Jesus' great pain He loves her and He wants her to be provided for. Jesus also has a strong relationship with the disciple John. He can trust him to take care of his mother and He can trust John to not refuse His request.

Jesus uses "woman" (**slide**) when speaking to his mother. Addressing someone as "woman" sounds harsh to us but the Greek word used in scripture did not mean any disrespect. We don't really have a corresponding word for it today. I would think of it as calling my mother ma'am or Mrs Misfeldt. It would sound more like "Ma'am, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

"woman" is used one other time by Jesus to refer to His mother. That is in at the Marriage in Cana in Galilee.

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

The use of “woman” is significant and I think that it was used purposefully by the writer of John. The use of this word by Jesus on the Cross draws our attention back to the first time He used it to address his mother at the wedding in Cana. Mary asked Jesus for a favor and though he did not want to do anything, Jesus defers to the wishes of His mother and obeys. The relationship caused Him to act.

We can see Jesus’ relationship with His mother as bookends in the Gospel of John. (diagram with Cana Cross)

What is in the middle?

(diagram with Cana ... preaching, teaching, healing ... Cross)

Between the Wedding at Cana and the Cross, **Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, He spread the good news of the Kingdom of God.** Throughout John Jesus showed us how He cared for people. Jesus taught his disciples to do as He has done and then He sent them out as the first missionaries.

We know what is next. Jesus will die. He will be the living sacrifice that will make atonement with God for our sins. Why does He need to do that? Because God wants a relationship with us and our sin gets in the way of that. By dying, Jesus removes sin as a barrier between us and God so that we can have a fuller relationship with God.

As some of you know I have begun to attend Seminary. I’m in my second month now. One thing that I have learned from seminary already is that Scripture is overflowing with Gods Mission.

(slide with Genesis/Revelation on it)

Just as the word Woman served as a bookend for Jesus’ preaching, teaching, and reaching out to us, Genesis and Revelation, the whole Bible is God reaching out to us. On its simplest level God’s mission **in the Bible is to build a relationship with His people,** with you and me.

It started in the beginning in Genesis. God walks through the garden that He created for Adam and Eve and calls out **“Where are you?”(Gen 3:9).** But Adam has sinned and does not immediately respond. By definition sin is something that separates us from God.

Later in Genesis God calls to Abraham. “Here I am,” **Gen 22:1** Abraham responds. God gets the response that he was been waiting for. Isn’t that the way you respond to someone that you love?

Gods responds and builds a relationship not only with Abraham but with all people. God says

“I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. ...” Exodus 6:7

That is a relationship. God wants a relationship with us.

This is an overarching theme of Scripture.

If you wanted to sum up the Bible in one sentence, it could be



**“God wants a relationship with man and reaches out,
Man rejects God,
God judges,
God provides grace, and
God reaches out again.”
(arrow appears)**

In John God is reaching out to us just as Jesus reached out to care for His mother. By sending His son to die for our sins God wants us to be cared for.

How should we respond to God’s “Where are you?” By being here this morning you have already responded with one type of “I am here”.

However, if you have a deep relationship with someone you do not respond just with words but also by actions. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son because God asked him to and his relationship was so strong that he obeyed. Jesus responded to His mother and helped the wedding host. John took Mary in as his mother.

The best model on how to respond is Jesus and as he taught his disciples to do. Jesus spread the good news that God cares for us, wants a relationship with us. You can look at the Gospel of John as the story of Jesus teaching his disciples how to spread the Gospel. After the resurrection:

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

Is coming to church and praying responding? Yes, it is. Jesus taught us to pray. Is studying Gods word responding? Yes, Jesus taught us that scripture was important to learn. Yes, yes, yes, that is all responding to God.

What about reaching out to others and sharing the good news that God wants a relationship with everyone?

You don't spread the Gospel by just throwing a Bible at someone – perform a drive by evangelism. (that was OK, it wasn't a really Bible, no Bibles were desecrated in the production of this sermon). You need to build a relationship with people first.

You don't just pay someone else to do it or leave it to the professionals. You should do what Jesus said to do. Jesus did as He taught his disciples to do. Go out to people and tell them the good news.

We must respond not only with words but with actions that build relationships.

Do you have to move out of your home and go overseas? If God calls you to overseas missions then yes you need to obey. However, you don't have to go out of the country to respond to God's call. You do not need to go any further than this church.

Another truth in scripture is that you don't need to do it all yourself. God will provide.

We have visitors all the time. God has already done the work to get them in the church doors. He just needs you to step into the gap, connect with them, and build a relationship with them. Do you introduce yourself? Get to know them? Find some common ground? Do you invite them to lunch? At a past church a friend, Mark Boone, who had what he called a 'hospitality ministry'. If he saw a new person at church, he immediately invited them over for lunch. He would start to build a relationship with them.

You do not have to go out of your way to be a witness. You could be in a hospital room flat on your back next to a stranger in the next bed. The Holy Spirit could prompt you to share your faith with this stranger. You would be a witness.

When I was in College I fell away from attending Church. I stopped praying. My faith had not grown up with me as I got older. My relationship with God was on the rocks.

Airplane image

I was flying back from a visit to my Dad in Wisconsin. I got talking to the man next to me and he asked me about my faith. I briefly explained the situation. He offered to pray with me. I declined but I remembered the conversation. I can't forget that God was there, reaching out to me at 30,000 feet. It was one step that allowed me to eventually find my way back to God. God can be using you even if you do not see results. Your job is to be a witness and offer the good news.

This morning I'm going to highlight one way that you can build a relationship with people – through a Bible Study. Inviting a friend, neighbor, or co-worker to a Bible study is an easy way to get to

know them and to witness to them. If there is existing Bible Study that you can invite them to a Bible study, or you can host a bible study and invite them to. It isn't hard.

WVPC has a shortage of Bible Studies that new people can join. Kim sees new people looking to study God's word in small groups. You can host Bible Study.

Pray, listen to the Holy Spirit, ask God what He would have you do. You may hear "Todd, where are you" (loud voice), or a "Todd, where are you" (in a whisper).

This is the Year of Testimony & Praise. I wanted to give you an example of someone reaching out to others here, in this church community.

Bible Image

Earl Johns has had a **Bible Study** for 30 years. Recently his son Bill has taken over leadership of it. I've asked bill to come up and share a little of what it takes to lead a Bible Study.

Questions:

- 1) Briefly describe what you do?
- 2) How did the Bible Study get started?
- 3) Did you have to know a lot to start/lead a Bible Study?
- 4) What are the rewards of hosting a Bible Study?
- 5) Would you recommend it to others?

Thanks Bill.

02/17/2013

Good Morning. I'm Bill Johns. Todd asked me to talk to you this morning about my experiences in leading a Bible study group. Our group consists of about 12 members, some are couples and others singles, all with grown children and some grandchildren. We enjoy meeting in some of the members' homes, on a rotating basis, on Monday evenings, every other week. We are currently studying the Book of Acts, using this Life Guide Bible Study lesson guide with 24 individual studies. Our group has enjoyed this particular study, which has delved into Paul's missionary journeys.

As the group leader, I send reminder emails to our group, coordinate with the person who is hosting for the next lesson, and study for a few hours in preparation for my lesson. I like to do some extra research and bring additional information into the lesson to help set the scene for the group...for example, describing what it was like in Corinth, Athens or Ephesus during Paul's lifetime. I am not a Biblical scholar or theological expert...nor is that necessary to be a Bible study leader.

Rather, we are all learning together...the author of our study, in this case, Phyllis J. Le Peau, is well qualified in those regards. She provides the meat of each lesson, and as leader, I'm simply helping our group navigate the waters. I'm the discussion leader, but not the teacher. I try to make sure each person has a chance to contribute, try to keep the discussion on track, ensure the main points intended by the author are covered and understood, and keep us moving toward the highly anticipated conclusion of each evening's study...our delicious dessert, provided by one of the members.

Todd asked me to talk about how the Bible study group got started. I must give my dad all the credit for that. Way back in 1978, a member of Session asked my dad if he would be willing to start and lead a new Bible study group. Some of you may remember Ron Eckhardt. My dad said that he felt very inadequate, that he felt he was the one who needed Bible study so that he would not be Bible illiterate. After considering and praying about this, my dad told Ron he did not feel he could be the teacher, but that he could be a discussion leader. Ron said, OK, just be

the one to ask the questions and keep the discussion on track. Ron recommended having prayer time in which members could pray for each other. He also felt that a simple time for refreshments after each study was important, to provide some social time for members to better get to know each other. Ron and his wife, Linda, attended the new group for a time, and provided encouragement to my dad and mom. My dad and mom stuck with these principles and hosted a successful Bible study for the next 35 years. Over the years attendees came and went, some moving away, others passing on, but always, new members joining. Today, Don and Pat Strandburg remain as Charter members of my dad's group. Initially they met in various homes, and for the last many years, my parents hosted this every other week study in their own home.

During the past few years, I've been blessed to share more time with my parents, which included regular participation in their Bible study group, which I really came to enjoy. Several months ago, my dad, due to his declining health, felt that he could no longer continue as Bible study leader. This was a hard decision for him, as he really had come to enjoy

the experience, and he wanted to continue as long as possible. As I realized the day was coming when he could no longer lead the group, I felt God calling me to step in. I felt as he must have 35 years ago... inadequate to be a teacher, but yet, knowing that this was something I should do. After my dad announced to the group that this would be the final meeting, I approached some of the members and told them I would be willing to lead the Bible study, but did not know where we could meet. My parents' home would no longer be available. Quickly, several responded they would be willing to host the group in their own homes, on a rotating basis. So far, things have gone quite well and our group continues intact.

As both my dad and I have experienced, you do not need to know a lot about the Bible...there are wonderful study guides available to walk you through the experience. You need a little time and dedication and some group discussion leader skills, and many of us have experiences of that type from our professional or volunteer work. As in other things that

God may call us to do, we can be his hands and feet...he will provide the strength we need.

What are the rewards of hosting a Bible Study?

I spoke to my dad recently about his experience as a Bible study leader, and asked him what rewards he received. He responded positively and emotionally as he told me the experience had greatly increased his Faith and his understanding of the scriptures. In particular, he enjoyed learning who were the authors, what were they like, who was their audience, and the relationship of the many books of the Bible, such as the four synoptic gospels. He studied and became familiar with the many different translations of the Bible, and often used this knowledge as teaching points in his lessons. He saw great reward in watching the group grow in faith and maturity over the years, for example in the depth of discussion and the sincerity in prayers and support for one another. He spoke fondly of the many personal friendships...a special bond from

sharing of feelings within the group, among each other, and encouraging each to feel comfortable in sharing very personal thoughts and opinions.

If you feel God calling you to serve in this way, I would definitely recommend you do so. You may find it best to join a group first, and experience this from a mentor, as my dad and I did. A mentor is a great benefit in starting anything new, and this is a good idea in something like a Bible study. However, even that is not necessary. My son in the Seattle area was asked by his pastor to take on a Life Group which now meets in their home on a weekly basis. He started this with no Bible study experience, and now is in his third year of enjoying a strong small group of personal friends. If you are interested in joining or starting a Bible study group, talk to Linda Bale. She is coordinator of our small groups.

(Picture of God and Holy Spirit by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni -

<http://www.oceansbridge.com/oil-paintings/product/72657/godthefather1779>)

God wants to be in relationship with you. How are you responding today? Will you respond?

Helen Barrett Montgomery said

“We are not saved by a ‘plan,’ but by a Person”

If you want to start a bible study or more information on them, put a yellow card in the collection and

Kim will respond when she returns.

I ask you to think, and pray, and respond to Him whom you love.