

“Done!”

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Jesus was Mary’s favorite. She had to understand that she wasn’t his.

John 19:23-42

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Mom’s Favorite

My four siblings and I have had some good-natured ribbing through the years about who is the favorite child in the family. There are four brothers, and we all agree that my sister Elizabeth, the oldest, deserves the title for all she has done for Mom and Dad. She is not only the only girl, but the only that sibling who lives in the vicinity. Especially since Dad died a few years ago, Sis has been fantastic. But even Sis has referred to one corner of my parents’ home as “St. Bob’s shrine.”

My younger brother David went to visit Mom last weekend with three of his six children. Obviously, whoever is coming in person with offspring deserves the title “favorite child” during that visit. Mom is now 91. She lives alone but is still quite active, including teaching a weekly Sunday School and visiting the “old people” in the senior care facilities where my father was cared for before his passing.

David and three of his six kids went with Mom to Churchland House in Suffolk last Friday. The daughter of one of the residents, a woman named Deborah, was there to help round up the residents for Mom’s Bible study. As everyone gathered, proud Mom/Granny was introducing her family when David said, “I’m her favorite son.” Deborah piped up: “You must be Bob!” I will cherish this memory for years to come.

Let’s talk about Jesus’ mother. Our Catholic and Orthodox brothers and sisters believe in the “perpetual virginity of Mary,” which of course means she never had any children other than Jesus. Most Protestants see evidence in Scripture (Matthew 13:55-56) that Mary had several other children with Joseph after Jesus was born.

If you had asked Jesus' mother which of her children was the favorite, what would she have said? Like most mothers, she probably would have said, "I love them all the same." But really? Jesus was her firstborn, a son, the one whom Gabriel said would save his people from their sins, the one of whom angels told shepherds, "He is Christ the Lord," the one before whom wise men bowed and worshiped with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Except for gender, Jesus and Mary shared as much DNA as identical twins.

Today in our study of the Apostles' Creed we come to the part that says Jesus "was crucified, dead, and buried." As you picture the scene in John chapter 19, I need you to keep in mind that Jesus' mother is watching. Her favorite is on that cross.

Soldiers (16b-24)

Like the other Gospels, John omits most details about Jesus' suffering. Three times he says "They crucified him" (18, 20, 23). He doesn't graphically describe the unspeakable physical suffering because the primary effect would be pity. As Pastor Paul said last week, an emotional response doesn't change lives. Sympathy is not faith. The physical suffering of Jesus is not the point. Something else is going on.

Four hardened, seasoned Roman soldiers are living out "another day at the office." What intrigues John about the soldiers is not their callousness over his pain as they nail his wrists to the cross beam and hoist his body into a position that will render painless breathing impossible.

John focuses attention on the game they play – casting lots to decide who goes home with his undergarment. We're not talking about briefs or boxers. This is a full length, handwoven, seamless, tunic that could be worn as one's only article of clothing. Most men owned only one, often a gift from their mother as they went out into the world. This one was nice enough that the soldiers didn't want to just cut it up into rags. After a good washing, it would give many more years of wear. They cast lots for it.

It's not at all a stretch, then, to see this scene through the eyes of Jesus' mother. Her favorite son is stripped naked to humiliate him further. His head covering, shoes, girdle, and outer garment are distributed. They then gamble for the seamless tunic his mother wove for him. What's important to John is that this is one more thread weaving together the seamless story line of God's mercy, where every line in the Hebrew Bible becomes part of the fabric of God's love displayed in Jesus. John quotes Psalm 22, a psalm Jesus himself quoted on the cross: "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment" (24).

His mother and his best friend (25-27)

The next vignette is among the most familiar, as Jesus transfers care of his mother to his best friend, presumably John, the writer of the Gospel. John widens the

camera lens, taking our eyes off Jesus momentarily to four women who are standing nearby (25). They include Jesus' mother (who's never named in this gospel), his aunt (who is most likely John's own mother, and he doesn't name her for some of the same reasons he doesn't name himself), Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. They're all important, but none as much as Jesus' mother.

Jesus notices her and their eyes lock. You can only imagine what is going through her mind as she watches her favorite son struggle for air and water. She's absolutely powerless to alleviate his suffering or alter his destiny, which is what any mother would want to do. We want to recall many stories in the Gospels, particularly Luke, about her, but John has only included one story about her so far in his gospel. It was at the wedding in Cana. She had informed him about the awkward problem of the hosts running out of wine, and he had answered somewhat brusquely, "Why are you involving me? My hour is not yet come." The same word for "hour" is used in 19:27 – "From that hour the disciple took her into his own (home)." The hour had come.

Back in chapter 2, she had told the servants to "do whatever he tells you," and he turned the water into wine, his first miracle. On both occasions, he addressed her as "Woman." It was not a term of disrespect, but neither was it a term of affection. It wasn't a dismissive "Lady..." But neither was it a warm "Mom..." Here on the cross he says, "Woman, here is your son" (26) gesturing to John. And to John, "Here is your mother" (27).

What's happening here? Jesus may be his mother's favorite, but she has been learning that she can't see herself as his favorite. If she were his primary concern at this moment, he would come down from that cross and alleviate her suffering. He sees her as a disciple, not as a mother. He cares for her, he provides for her, he grieves for her, he loves her – as he does John and every person. He's really committing her and John to one another's care. "Take care of each other," he is telling them, as he had earlier said to his disciples, "Wash each other's feet" and "Love one another as I have loved you." She's to be part of the community, neither greater nor lesser than the others. He is dying for his mother, and his cousin, and for you, and for me.

Done! (28-30)

In the next vignette, Jesus speaks again, twice. He first says, "I am thirsty" (28). The most common way to understand this is that he is physically thirsty. His body was dehydrated from severe loss of blood from flogging and crucifixion, plus loss of water under the hot Jerusalem sun, caused cramping and pain and besides, he had more he wanted to say and needed to soothe his throat. I don't deny any of that is true.

John is the master of connections, not only with the Old Testament Scriptures, but with other stories he tells. Virtually everything in this crucifixion scene ties into something else in his gospel. What connection might be in John's mind here? Perhaps it is the story of the woman at the well, to whom Jesus had said, "Whoever drinks the

water I give will never thirst. Indeed the water I give will become a spring of water welling up into eternal life” (John 4:14). As he hangs suspended between heaven and earth, forsaken by both for our sins, this is the only moment in eternity or time when his soul is thirsty for God, who has forsaken him.

The soldiers don’t understand this, so they moisten his lips and throat (29). What’s important to John once again is the link between Scripture and this moment. What’s not obvious in most English translations is that the same verb occurs three times in this vignette. Its root is *telos*, which means end, goal, completion.

Verse 28 should read, “After this, Jesus, knowing now that everything had been *completed*, in order that Scripture might be *completed*, says, ‘I thirst.’” (Skip to verse 30.) “When therefore he took the wine, Jesus said, “It has been *completed*.” In a word: “Done!” Finished. Ended. Accomplished. What was completed? Everything. He had come into the world with a mission – to save it (John 3:17). It was done. His incarnation, his sinless mortal life, his identification with our race, his sharing of our suffering, his sacrifice on our behalf, the thirstiness of a soul from whom springs the water of life. It was all done, over. For his watching mother, it was done as well.

Blood and water (31-37)

It’s now getting late on Friday afternoon, which matters not at all to the soldiers, but matters much to the Jews. They want Jesus and the other crucified victims to be removed from the crosses before sundown, which marked not only the beginning of the Sabbath but of a “special Sabbath” (31) during Passover week. Crucifixion was designed to extend suffering for days. The soldiers knew if they broke the legs of the victims, they could no longer push up for air and would quickly suffocate.

Pilate consented for the soldiers to break the legs of all three, which they did to the two criminals crucified with him. When they came to Jesus, he was already dead, reinforcing his earlier statement, “No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18). They puncture his side, and out flow blood and water (34). This is not only physical evidence that he was already dead, but once again John is tying together the themes of his gospel. Not only had he told the woman at the well that he is the source of living water, he had said after the feeding of the 5000 that drinking his blood is eternal life (John 6:53-56).

Two hymns come to mind, from Fanny Crosby and Augustus Toplady:

*Jesus, keep me near the cross: There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream, Flows from Calvary’s mountain.*

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

For John, the water and blood make his account even more believable (35), meaning that Jesus' claims and his death are absolutely true. Once again, it all ties together with the scarlet thread of Scripture that points directly at him (36-37).

I don't want to forget that his mother is still there. How do we know? John is still there, according to verse 35, and she's with him. There's almost no agony like that of a mother who sees her son take his last breath.

Buried (38-42)

This brings us to John's fifth and final vignette. It's a part of the story that doesn't get as much attention. We go from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, but the Apostles' Creed rightly points our attention to Jesus' burial. All four gospel writers and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:3), emphasize the burial of Jesus.

Why? The *Heidelberg Catechism* says, "To prove that he was really dead." That's critical, but there's more to how John tells this part of the story.

Two wealthy, prominent Jewish leaders care for Jesus; Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took charge of Jesus' body. That's important for several reasons. We now know that not all the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus or disbelieved him. We also know that sometimes when we are afraid, as Joseph had been to admit he was a believer (38), God redeems and even uses our fears. If Joseph had openly believed in Jesus or opposed his crucifixion, all this may not have played out the way it needed to. We also learn "the rest of the story" of Nicodemus (39), because we had been left hanging in chapter 3. He too seems to have embraced Jesus – remarkably after his crucifixion but before his resurrection.

The fact that Pilate allowed this may be evidence that he believed Jesus was innocent. Condemned criminals were simply dumped in a mass grave and not given proper burial. The quantity of myrrh and aloes, seventy-five pounds, was appropriate for royalty. Its value has been estimated between \$100,000 and \$200,000. The attention to detail here – more attention than John gives to the details of the flogging and crucifixion – shows how important it is that Jesus is buried.

The unused tomb (41) is important so that there can be no question there was only one body placed in the tomb. Nobody could say on Sunday or any other time, "They checked the wrong part of the tomb when they thought it was empty."

God's favorite

Is it important to decide whether Jesus was Mary's favorite child? Probably not.

If you have more than one, who would you say is your favorite? None of them? Or all of them? I tell each Confirmation class, "You're my favorite," and I mean it. My

favorite class is the one I'm leading now. My favorite church member is the one who needs me at the moment.

Don't you think God thinks that way? What does it mean to you to know that you are God's "favorite child" at the very moment you need him? Because he's God, he doesn't have to choose, of course. But from our vantage point, we can think of ourselves at any moment, but especially our moment of greatest need, as his favorite.

When you doubt if you're his favorite, go back to the cross. Go back and remember that he might have been Mary's favorite son, but he was God's only Son. Go back and recall that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son (3:16).

Why else is this important? I love what the Apostle Paul does with this part of our faith. He hangs almost everything on it. Like the Gospel writers, he feels no need to go into the details of Jesus carrying the cross or being flogged or the crown of thorns or the nails or the struggle to breathe. Paul does want you to know that what John describes in chapter 19 matters to you every day of your faith life. Why?

Paul's great teaching on this is found in Romans 6.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

You died that day. Sin died that day. Death died that day. The power of sin over you breathed its last and has never again been seen. You need no longer say, "I can't help it." Sin has been rendered toothless.

You may say, "Well, Pastor Bob, sometimes it doesn't feel that way. I give in too easily and too often." Here's the good news. Guilt was buried that day. Shame was sealed in a tomb. When Jesus came back from the dead, guilt and shame did not. For those who trust in Christ, you need never wonder if today's failure has cut you off from God. It is finished, completed, done. The blood and water flowed for you.

That's what it means that Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. You can say with confidence, "I'm his favorite." Amen.