

This morning, we opened this service with a Call to Worship, proclaiming that God calls us into relationship with him and with others. When we need it the most, God gives us someone to help us. When others need help, God calls us to love and care for them. We see this in the passage for today. In the third of the last words of Jesus, he gives his mother and his friend to each other, to care for each other and to walk the rest of their journey together.

Even in the midst of his suffering, Jesus remembers his family responsibility as the eldest son. It is assumed that Joseph has already passed away, and Mary did not remarry. In their culture, the eldest son was responsible for taking care of his mother if the father passes away, and he would decide whom he would pass on the responsibility to when he died.

Jesus had four younger brothers. In most family situations, the eldest would probably ask the brother next-in-line or at least one of them, but he doesn't. Why didn't he choose his related brothers to care for their mother? It could be because his brothers were still skeptical about who Jesus is. They knew Jesus as their elder brother, not as the Christ, so they weren't on board just yet. They didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah until after he resurrected.

It could also be because they simply weren't there at the foot of the cross when this exchange happened. This passage tells us that his mother, his aunt, two more Marys (Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas) and John, the disciple, were there. Of course, there's a crowd, but within that crowd, these are his people, his close friends and family who showed up for him, who stood by his side no matter how painful it

was to watch. The other disciples were in hiding, and his other related brothers and sisters simply weren't there.

Sometimes, God uses whomever is near us at the moment. Sometimes, God uses us to care for others who are near us at that present moment. But this exchange was more than Jesus arranging for his friend to take over his family responsibility. Jesus "gives" them to each other.

Jesus knows surviving his loss would be the hardest thing the two would attempt, so he gave them each other to walk that journey together. He knows they will need each other. The love they share for him could help them to love each other in a similar way and to get through the pain of the loss.

Jesus didn't just put John in charge of his mom. He gives them a new identity. Mary knew John as her son's close friend and follower, and John knew Mary as his best friend's mom. But, from this moment on, their relationship changed. It deepens from friend to family. Jesus changes their identity to Son and Mother to each other. There really is a change in which Mary becomes his mother as John takes her into his home. Friends become family as we are united in the family of God.

My friend Shannon was here visiting two weeks ago, and many of you met her. We have been friends for over twenty years. I met her in Mobile, Alabama, at Spring Hill College. I was 25 or 26 and working in the Alumni office. She was a student at Spring Hill and began working for me as a student caller. I was the director of the phone bank that hired and trained students to call alumni and ask them for money.

We hit it off from the beginning. We enjoyed working together, and there were only four years between us, so a friendship grew. I had recently moved to Mobile, so I didn't have many friends yet. Not long after the move, the relationship I was in fell apart, and I was put into a dangerous situation. I really didn't know how I was going to get out of that situation or who to turn to because I was away from my family. I felt so alone.

God gave me Shannon to help me through this. She took me in to her home, and we became family. She is more of a sister to me than a friend. Because I recognize that God gave her to me, our relationship is sacred. God gives us people who help us through our struggles. God cares for us through the people we find in our lives at the very moment we need them. These people become our family.

This passage shows us God's family of believers at the foot of the cross. The four women and John became a family, as they were adopted into the family of God. We are also in God's family and become brothers and sisters. We are given a new identity as brothers and sisters. What does it look like to be in God's family? We are open and vulnerable with each other. We accept each other's faults, yet encourage each other in a loving way. We show up and are present for each other. We listen and stay in the present moment with each other. We put down our phones when others talk to us. We talk to others with respect. We take them into our homes and treat them as our own.

We were designed to be in relationship. The whole reason the Word became flesh was to join us in our humanity

to be in relationship with us. God created us, so he can be in relationship with us. Genesis 3 tells us that God walked with Adam and Eve in Paradise. And, the fact Eve was made as a companion to Adam speaks about human's desire for connection. We all seek to be in loving relationships with others. We experience Christ's love and care by being in relationship with others.

Jesus turns people toward each other, even as he is dying. He offers Mary and John to each other to show that he will continue to be with them, through their relationship with one another. Jesus shows us that he is always with us and caring for us through the people he gives us at just the right moment. Family is expanded further than whom we are related to. Look around you. God has given you people right here, in this moment of your life, to help you through your struggles. And, God is calling you to love and care for someone near you. Who is it? Right here, in this moment, Jesus is with us, reaching out for us, seeking to be in relationship with us, through the people he places in our lives. Amen.