

**Community Good Friday Worship Service, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church,
Beverly, NJ
April 10, 2009**

John 19:25-27 "Woman, behold thy son...behold thy mother."

Third Words of Christ

Hello. My name is Mary. I am the mother of Jesus Christ. I am here to tell you about my son's crucifixion as I witnessed it.

Many of you know the story of Jesus' unique birth, His ministry, and the events of what you call Holy Week. Much is written about these things. In the Gospel of John, you read about two of the times I am with my son during His ministry. The first recorded time is at a wedding in Cana where He changes water into wine. The second recorded time is at Jesus' crucifixion.

As soon as the disciples told me of my son's arrest, trial, and conviction, I came as quickly as I could. I had with me three other women: my sister Salome who is the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, her husband. I was also accompanied by Mary, the wife of Cleopas whom Luke describes on the road to Emmaus, and Mary Magdalene who is Jesus' best female friend, one of His most loyal and faithful followers. We are all believers of my son and follow Him almost everywhere. We are all very close. The thought of Him being crucified filled us with deep sorrow.

After receiving the news, we struggled through the crowds to keep pace with Jesus as He slowly trudged on the Villa Della Rosa from the place of His humiliating trial, up the hill of Golgotha. The crowds which at one time

followed Him singing praises and coming to be healed were now jeering Him, ridiculing and spitting on Him. The chief priests, Pharisees, and soldiers along the route, encouraged the crowds, whipping them into a frenzy. Occasionally, I caught glimpses of my son. His garment, which I made for Him, was torn, tattered, and stained with His own blood from the 39 lashes He received without comment. His face was also stained with blood. He wore a circle of woven thorn branches which continued to create new wounds where it touched Him. The look on His face was blank, almost numb. The Cross weighed more than Him. The weight of the Cross and His weakened physical condition caused Him to stumble so often that the soldiers allowed someone from the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, to carry it for Him. When the procession including two thieves with their crosses reached the top of the hill, also known as the town's garbage dump, the two thieves were tied onto their crosses with heavy cords. But not my son. They used large iron spikes to nail Him to His Cross. I winced inside at each hammer blow. Then the Crosses were set up.

It is not easy to watch your first born, God-given son be nailed to a Cross and hanged to die. I was grateful to have the other women. We supported each other. I wondered what was going through Jesus' mind. No matter what kind of situation, He always seemed calm, except when He cleaned out the Temple in Jerusalem once. I would have enjoyed watching Him do that!

The other women and I stayed at the foot of Jesus' Cross the entire time. We prayed and wept; then we wept and prayed. We were so full of sadness and sorrow. But we were determined to stay with Him until the end. In some ways, I think we were hoping He would come down from the Cross

and not die. But I knew in my heart that would not happen. All through Jesus' life, I knew He was God's Son as well as mine and knew He had to live His life the way God said.

Yes, there were many times I did not understand why He did what He did. But I found comfort in knowing He belonged to God first. Do not misunderstand me. Jesus was always loving with me and respectful to me. But He would tell me only what I needed to know.

I have mentioned the women who were with me. There were also a few disciples with us: James and John, my nephews, who came with my sister Salome. Many of the other disciples had gone into hiding and did not want to be identified with Jesus for fear of being arrested, tried, and convicted themselves. But John was close to Jesus and stayed with us. They loved each other like brothers.

When Jesus was close to breathing His last, He summoned up a small amount of His energy, looked toward John and me and warmly spoke to me saying: "Woman, here is your son." Then He said to John, "Here is your mother." Jesus was asking my nephew and His beloved disciple to take me into his home and care for me. Jesus was thoughtful about those whom He loved, even in His dying breath.

I was so consumed by my grief that I had given no thought to what might become of me when Jesus died! But He knew. He and His heavenly Father had it all planned. Jesus entrusted John and me into each other's care. He knew we were already close. John was already caring for my sister and her

husband, so it was a logical choice. Despite my deep sadness, Jesus' actions, His love for me and His thoughtfulness brought a tiny smile to my face. But the impact of knowing His end was near brought fresh tears and sobbing. John held me as He held his mother. We cried together and waited.

As I look back on the events of that terrible day, I find it interesting that despite my son's intense suffering and pain, He did not forget His lowly, humble, God-fearing, human mother. He made provisions for me for after His death by giving me to my nephew's care who was already like a son to me. I believe whenever God takes someone or something we depend on, He gives us someone or something in their place. I am happy and grateful John accepted His new responsibility. That very evening, He took me into his home. I spent the rest of my days with John, even when he was sent into exile.

I thank God for my son and for His caring for me. John and I cared for each other as mother and son for the rest of my days. May God take care of you for the rest of your days as well.

I will share with you these words of Alan Llwyd, which describe the results of the Crucifixion and our agony:

Yes, He was destroyed;
Yes He was nailed and torn
on a rough tree against the open sky,
and the rough nails were driven
blood red through His palms.

Mary and her family were hammered
with Him to the husky angry sound
of Romans and a savage crowd,
and through the holes in his pure palms,
through the rents of His body, the whole universe fell
into the endless void,
through the hands into the bottomless void.

Yes, He was left
to wilt gently like a flower,
but there
He was blossoming in the bowels of the darkness,
and the empty cave,
with the echo through its hollowness once more;

Yes, He discarded, in the mute pit,
His apparel of clay, until
the sound of His grave cover was heard,
moving under the power of His sanctity.

And the grave and mourning were victory;
death was a sea of light
in the pit of His departure.

Amen.