

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, February 28, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Near the Cross - John 19:25-27

Introduction: Do you remember where you were when certain events happened? I do. For example, when President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, I was in the 4th grade, and our teacher told us the horrifying news. When Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon in 1969, I was lying on the floor watching it on our black and white TV. When the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986, I was in my office at my former church in Dallas when Elaine called and told me. I immediately went home and watched the drama unfold on TV for the rest of the day? And in 2001, when I heard about the 9-11 attacks, I was again in my study at my former church in Rome, and saw it on the internet.

Most people can recall not only where they were, but what they were doing when those kind of events happen. Some things are so earth-shattering, and they affect our lives so significantly, the details are etched in our minds forever.

This morning, I would like to ask you about where you were when another earth-shattering event occurred. It is the biggest, most important event in all of history. Where were you when Jesus was crucified?

There is an old Negro Spiritual that goes, *“Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”*

When Dr. R.G. Lee visited Jerusalem for the first time, he was with a group of other pastors. When they entered the area leading up to Golgotha, Dr. Lee left the group and ran ahead. When the group arrived, Dr. Lee was on His knees weeping. The guide said, *“Dr. Lee have you ever been here before?”* Dr. Lee replied, *“Yes, I was here over 2,000 years ago. I was here in the heart and mind of Jesus when He died for me.”*

Dr. Lee was right. In a real sense, we all were there in the mind and heart of Jesus the day He was crucified.

As we enter into the Easter season, and focus our attention on the crucifixion, I hope we’ll see that we were there when they crucified my Lord. I hope we can see ourselves in the many people who were gathered there that day.

In John’s account of the crucifixion of Jesus, he identifies some of the people who were there that day. He said they stood, *“near the cross.”*

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. **John 19:25-27 (NIV)***

Of course, there were other people near the cross that day. The Roman soldiers were there because they had been assigned the task of carrying out the execution of these condemned criminals, but they were only there out of duty.

We also know that there were some of the religious leaders who had Jesus arrested and tried who were there that day, but they were there only to make sure Jesus died and was out of their way.

But John specifically mentions five people in particular who were near the cross of Jesus for other reasons. Four of the five are women. I think that is interesting, but not unusual. Think about it... from the onset of Jesus’ ministry, it was the women who kept Him and the disciples fed and clothed (Luke 8:2-3). Jesus healed many women and helped many women overcome the injustices they were being subjected to. In fact, He had more contact with women than the culture found acceptable. So women were an important part of Jesus’ ministry, and they still are today.

It’s not unusual to find the women outnumbering men in church, and doing most of the work in church. What would we do without our women doing the cooking, cleaning, serving, teaching, watching after the church finances, and keeping the nursery? Where would our churches be without faithful, dedicated and gifted women who understand what needs to be done, and get in there and do it? I thank God for people who are willing to be used by God to accomplish His purposes – male or female.

We sing a hymn called, "Near the Cross." That first stanza says, "*Jesus, keep me near the cross,...*" We love to sing that song, but I wonder just how near the cross are we really are?

We know that physically speaking, these five were near the cross that day. They were there because they were friends of Jesus, and it's understandable that they wanted to be there. But I believe they were there for other reasons as well. And by looking at these other reasons, let's consider what it means in another sense to be "*near the cross*" Let's talk about finding our place near the cross as these five did. As they stood near the cross when Jesus was crucified, we're going to see what it meant for them and what it can mean for us. First, let's notice Mary Magdalene. She stood near the cross in:

1. A Place of Redemption

Before Mary Magdalene met the Savior, she was in a hopeless and helpless situation. Here was a lady who had been in bondage to Satan for a long time, and was actually possessed by not one, but seven demons. These satanic demons were destroying her physically, emotionally and spiritually.

But Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus came along and miraculously cast out the demons. He delivered Mary from her bondage. He redeemed her and saved her and set her free.

Acts 26:18 (NIV) tells us that Jesus had sent the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles: "*to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins...*"

That's exactly what Jesus did for Mary Magdalene. As He cast out those demons, her eyes were opened, and she was transformed from darkness to light. She was freed from the power of Satan who had control of her. She was redeemed and forgiven and delivered from her miserable condition. At that moment, I'm sure all she could think about was how this man had affected her life for the better.

But as Mary stood near the cross that day; I believe her thoughts were not so much about her, but about the fact that her redemption was a costly thing. At the cross, Mary saw the price being paid for her sin.

What did our redemption cost, you ask?

- Our redemption cost Jesus leaving the light of heaven and having to come into a dark and sinful world.
- Our redemption cost Jesus becoming the poorest of the poor; not even having a place to lay His head.
- Our redemption cost Jesus being falsely accused, going through a mock trial, and being mercilessly beaten and ridiculed more than any other man.
- Our redemption cost Jesus being made sin and thus being forsaken by God.

Yes, redemption is a costly thing. No wonder Mary Magdalene stood oh so near the cross. She was standing at the place of redemption, and so should all of us who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. If you haven't realized what your redemption cost the Son of God, come and stand near the cross with Mary Magdalene, and you'll see you yourself.

Next, near the cross we find Jesus' aunt standing in:

2. A Place of Rebuke

Who was Jesus' mother's sister? According to Mark 15:40, her name was Salome. She is also mentioned in Mark 16:1 as one of the women who came to Jesus' tomb on resurrection day. It is also believed by many that Salome was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John.

According to Matthew 20:20-23, this lady was the mother of James and John and was the one who once came to Jesus asking Him if her two sons could have places of honor in His kingdom - one on His right and the other on His left. On one hand, this sounds like a mother simply wanting the best for her sons, but on the other hand, it was a very prideful and selfish request. Jesus' response to her indicated the latter, and also implied that it was a request made in ignorance.

He said, "*You don't know what you are asking.*" He asked, "*Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*" **Matthew 20:22 (NIV)**. Of course, He was referring to His death.

What He was telling Salome was that thrones are not given away, they must be earned. Salome had not thought of that. She didn't realize that there would be a price to pay for a crown. And I'm sure she didn't realize then that Jesus was talking about Himself returning to the throne of heaven by way of the cross.

Sometimes we can be so selfish in our what we ask for can't we? I heard a story about a young autograph seeker who approached a famous golfer after he'd just won a major golf tournament. He said, "*Wow, I'd give anything to be able to swing a golf club like you.*" The golfer said, "*Would you give up sleep so you can be out*

on the driving range every morning for the next 20 years, swinging a golf club a thousand times until your hands bleed? Would you give up playing video games or hanging out with your friends at the mall, or playing ball every evening so you can practice putting until dark? If you're willing to do that, then you can swing a club like me, 'cause that's what I did."

Jesus told Salome, "If you want the glory, you have to pay the price." So as Salome stood near the cross that day, I believe she stood in a place of rebuke because that is where she fully realized that Jesus was talking about His death when he asked her, "Can you drink the cup that I going to drink?"

And ultimately, her sons did pay the price as James was martyred and John was exiled to a lonely island before they went home to glory.

We come to God asking for what we want, and we don't realize that we're really asking out of selfish ambition, or greed, pride or even glory.

And as we think about the cross, how many of us stand in the place of rebuke because of our selfish desires? When Jesus asks us, "Are you willing to take up your cross and follow me?" We say, "No, I've got my life planned out, but I'll take a rain check on that." When Jesus says, "The fields are ripe for a harvest, so go and make disciples and baptize and teach all nations about me!" We say, "Well, I hear you Lord, but I'd rather you send someone else to do that stuff, 'cause I'm so busy with all these other things that I want to do, I just don't have time." When Jesus says, "Are you willing to suffer for me?" We say, "Oh no, Lord, I just want the blessing, I didn't sign up for any suffering!"

I think Salome would say to us today, "You need to come to the cross, 'cause it's a place of rebuke." That is where you'll see first-hand what Jesus did for you and what He gave up for you. Next, we find Jesus' own mother near the cross at:

3. A Place of Reward

How did Jesus reward His mother you ask? He rewarded her by sharing His friend John with her. He said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." **John 19:26b (NIV)**

Now we just said that rewards don't come unless there is a price to be paid, so what kind of price did Mary pay? What kind of suffering did she endure?

Luke's gospel reveals a prophecy concerning Mary. When Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, a man named Simeon was there looking for the Messiah. Luke says he took the child and offered a blessing. But at the end of the blessing, he said to Mary, "A sword shall pierce your own soul also" **Luke 2:35 (NIV)**

What did this mean? It meant that Mary would suffer. And suffer she did. Didn't she pay the price when she was found to be with child out of wedlock, and got the whole town talking about her shame? Didn't she pay the price when she brought the Savior into the world? Didn't she pay the price by having to flee to Egypt to save her child? Didn't she pay the price knowing that thousands of innocent children died at the hands of Herod because he was after her son? You better believe she did. So by the time of Jesus' arrest, she had already felt the tip of that sword prick her very soul. But at the cross, she felt the full thrust of that sword piercing her soul through. Watching her Son die; watching Him die between two thieves, and watching Him die publically and disgracefully had to be the worst pain a mother could feel.

But Jesus He saw her there and He felt her pain. And He assured her of His love for her, by establishing a new relationship with her. He said, "I am going back to heaven. Because of this we're going to have a whole new relationship. So in order to give you peace and help heal your broken heart, I'm giving you to John. He's going to take my place taking care of you."

Jesus rewarded her by giving her to the disciple He loved so dearly. Think about it! What else could He give? He didn't have any possessions except His clothing, and the soldiers had gambled those away, so what could He give Mary? He gave her His friend, and according to vs. 27, John took her into his own house.

So for Mary, to stand at the cross was to stand at a place of reward. Ultimately, God rewards those who suffer for His sake, and the Scriptures say to, "rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." **1 Peter 4:13 (NIV)**. In other words, Jesus was rewarded for His sufferings, and so shall we, but it will come by way of the cross. Finally, near the cross we find two others who are standing at:

4. A Place of Responsibility

The two are Mary, the wife of Clopas and John, the beloved disciple. They are near the cross in their place of responsibility.

Let's start with Mary of Clopas. Who is she? Well, her identity is somewhat of a mystery. In fact here and possibly in one other place (Matthew 28:1 – *“the other Mary”*) are the only references to her in all of Scripture. But she is here and I think it is significant that she is. Here's why.

You and I all know of those folks who work behind the scenes, doing whatever needs to be done. They are the faithful, the dependable, the reliable, and the ones you can always count on. They are also the ones who don't need nor want any attention. They'd rather serve in silence than receive any kind of notoriety.

When I first became a choir director, I knew the choir needed to be organized and trained to sing parts. Since I didn't know much about that, I called a friend of mine who had a lot of experience in leading choirs, to come and help me. He did, and when he started out, he asked the choir members, one-by-one why they sang in the choir. Well, when he got to one particular man, he simply said, *“Well, I know can't sing very well, but I just feel the need to fill my place.”*

That's what I'm talking about with this dear lady. She may not have done anything that the world would deem as great, but here she is, filling her place of responsibility just as she'd done time and time again in Jesus' ministry. She was faithful, dependable and reliable. She seemed to always be in her place of responsibility, doing what needed to be done.

To those who are like Mary of Clopas, I thank you. I won't call any names, because you wouldn't want me to. You know who you are and Jesus knows who you are because even today, you're standing near the cross in your place of responsibility.

The other person who was near the cross was John, the beloved disciple. Now this is significant because if you recall, the Bible says that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, *“all the disciples deserted him and fled.”* **Matthew 26:56 (NIV)**. But, now we see John standing at the cross of Jesus as a restored and forgiven man.

What this says to us is that there's room at the cross for all – even for those who stray or even deny Jesus. It doesn't matter what we've done. The cross is the place to go for forgiveness, deliverance and restoration. Perhaps this is why John would later write that classic passage on forgiveness: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**.

But Jesus not only restored John, He also gave him the responsibility of taking care of His mother as a son would. So, for John, the cross was a place of restoration and responsibility.

In a similar way, Jesus gives us all the responsibility of taking His place here on earth. In **John 20:21 (NIV)**, Jesus tells us that, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* So we are His representative to others. We are His hands and feet, and to come to the cross, is to acknowledge our place of responsibility. It's our responsibility to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one another.

Conclusion: The point of this message is: There is a place *“near the cross”* for us all to come today. If you have never trusted the Lord as your Savior, or you've been too self-righteous to see your need for a Savior, you need to come to **the place of redemption**. That would be the best place to stand today.

If you're here today and you've grown so cold, that you've found yourself too proud to kneel at the cross, or you've become someone who feels that it's all about you, you need to come to **the place of rebuke** and see what Jesus went through for you. When you do, you find all that pride and selfishness fading away.

Or you may be here today, and you've already humbly stood at the cross before. You've admitted your need for Jesus and confessed your sins, and have accepted Him as your Savior and Lord. You've answered His call upon your life and you've served Him faithfully over the years. Oh, there may have been times when you've struggled, but this morning as you come to the cross, you come to **the place of reward** for your faithfulness.

Or, you may have realized that as you come near the cross, you cannot hide any longer. Maybe you've realized that Jesus has given you a mission and a ministry to fulfill. Perhaps you just need to come to **the place of responsibility** and be about your Father's business. You need to get to work to the task God has called you to do.

Whatever your place is today, come and stand near the cross as a trembling soul. Let the love and mercy of Jesus find you and that bright and morning star sheds His beams around you. Watch and wait there. Hope and trust there until you reach that place of rest that is just beyond the river.