

## THE WORDS OF NEED

## JOHN 19:25-29

There's a call button above every seat on commercial airplanes. Have you ever used it? I have, but it's been very infrequent. Maybe it's because we're shy or maybe because we're proud, but we don't like to admit we have a need. So, we endure being thirsty, or hungry, or cold, or bored, or whatever. We're reluctant to press the call button and often we excuse that reticence because it just seems more courteous to wait. As Jesus hung on the Cross, one of the last phrases he spoke out loud was "I am thirsty." It was a subtle, but significant acknowledgment of Jesus' very human need. It was a small declaration of his physical need. He pushed the call button, because He knew God is the One who's ultimately responsible to supply all of our needs.

Our current message series during Lent is focused on what Jesus said over six hours as He hung on the cross dying to pay the penalty for our sins. I call it *Cross Words: Jesus' Statements Before He Died*. Each statement helps us understand better what Jesus accomplished for us when He died and rose again. This morning I want us to reflect together on two of Jesus' statements. Let's think of those two statements from the cross as "The Words of Need." The first word of need is something Jesus said to his mother, Mary, "Dear woman, here is your son" coupled with what He said about Mary to the man he called her son, "Here is your mother." (Jo. 19:26-27 NLT) Bible scholars are all but united in identifying this man as John, one of Jesus' twelve original disciples and the author of the Gospel of John. The second word of need is something Jesus said about Himself, "I am thirsty." (Jo. 19:28 NLT) What do these words of need reveal that help us better appreciate what Jesus did on our behalf at the cross and the empty tomb?

### WHAT DID MARY AND JOHN'S NEED REVEAL?

Several of Jesus' statements were expressions of concern about the needs of others. "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34 NLT) Jesus's killers desperately needed forgiveness. "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43 NLT) That statement was directed to one of the two thieves crucified next to Jesus. He needed salvation. Today, Jesus' first statement is directed toward Mary and John who were at the cross together. If nothing else – that concern for the needs of others in the midst of His great personal suffering – is a powerful lesson about God's love as it flowed through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For example, it's a reminder that God's love is wider than you think. Maybe it strikes you as odd that Jesus referred to Mary as "dear woman" instead of "mother" here. There was no disrespect intended, but it's quite possible Jesus was gently teaching his mother that God's love is wider than we might think. Jesus implied here that spiritual relationships are more important than physical ones. Why did Jesus entrust Mary's spiritual and physical care to John? Yes, she was likely a widow by then. Joseph had already died. But Jesus had half-brothers – other children of Mary and Joseph. Why didn't Jesus entrust His mother to them? Mary and John weren't related. Apparently, none of Jesus' other family members believed in Him until after the resurrection, but

Mary and John both loved Jesus deeply. They both believed in Him. That was more important than some kind of blood or biological kinship.

One result of Jesus' death and resurrection is the creation of a new family – a new community. That explains why you may enjoy deeper relationships with your Christian friends than you do members of your biological family who don't follow Jesus. What are the characteristics of this new family? You become a member of this family through a spiritual rebirth. The Bible says, "But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God." (Jo 1:12-13 NLT) Members of this family have the same love for and allegiance to the One who died for them. Both Mary and John loved Jesus, believed in Jesus, and trusted in Jesus. For Mary, Jesus was now more than her son. He had become her Savior. For John, Jesus was now more than his teacher and friend. He had become his Lord. You're a spiritual brother or sister to anyone who loves Jesus and is loyal to Him.

Members of this new family are focused on doing God's will. Once Jesus said, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?... Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!" (Mt. 12:48, 50 NLT) Your unsaved blood relatives likely have no interest in doing God's will. That may explain why you feel distant from them. If you want to do God's will, your closest relationships in life will be with those who share that passion. Members of this new family show sacrificial love for one another. Jesus said this characteristic defined His true disciples. "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (Jo 13:34-35 NLT) Jesus wanted John to take His mother into his own home and provide for her. He wanted John to be there for Mary emotionally and spiritually as well. The Bible doesn't tell us this, but there's a strong historical tradition suggesting Mary did indeed live in John's home until she died. No doubt that required a level of sacrifice on John's part. Maybe on Mary's part, too.

I believe this scene underlines an important implication for us. You should value your spiritual family even more highly than your biological family. Of course you should love your biological family and do everything to nurture it, protect it, and celebrate it. It's one of God's good creations. But your spiritual family – those who are born again spiritually, who love Jesus, who want to do God's will, who can enter into sacrificial love – that new family has been created by Jesus' death and resurrection. No, those two families don't cancel each other out, by any means. It's a matter of priority. Jesus brought into existence a new family not based on biology, or race, or nationality, or social standing, but based on the fact that – like Mary and John – we find ourselves at the foot of His cross together looking up at Him with adoration and love. Value that family above any and every other family. Jesus does. God's love is wider than we think.

God's love is also deeper than we think. It's terrible for a parent to experience the death of his or her child. I can only imagine the incredible grief Mary suffered watching Jesus die and die so painfully. I wonder if Mary remembered what Simeon had said to her as she stood there looking up at her son on the cross. Simeon was the old man who had

offered a prophecy about Jesus when He was just a baby. He had said to Mary, “And a sword will pierce your very soul.” (Lk 2:35 NLT) Suffering doesn’t mean God’s love for us is lacking. It’s quite possible when Jesus made this statement He was looking at the two human beings He loved most – his mother, Mary, and John, who referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Their suffering that day was very real, but it wasn’t some kind of punishment from God – some kind of evidence God was displeased with them. It’s easy to jump to that conclusion when we suffer. I know we have many people here who are suffering this morning. Someone you dearly love died recently. Your health is broken. You’re trying to recover from a failed marriage. One of your children is far from God today. You’re facing a financial crisis of some kind. You might be battling against depression, substance abuse, or some kind of addiction. Suffering has a way of making us ask, “God, don’t You love me? Have I offended You?”

Mary at the cross is a reminder that great suffering may indeed come to those whom Jesus greatly loves. God’s love is deeper than suffering. God’s love and our suffering don’t cancel each other out. They co-exist. And God doesn’t always feel obligated to explain suffering to us. I doubt Mary understood why Jesus was suffering so terribly on that day. I doubt she expected Him to rise from the dead three days later. Mary and John’s faith was sincere but inadequate, hopeful but not well-informed. Kind of like our faith. We should do what they must have done. We commit our suffering to God – both the pain of it and the understanding of it – and believe God’s love is deeper than all of it.

I see one more revelation about God’s love in this scene. God’s love is stronger than we think. Peter wasn’t the only one of Jesus’ disciples to deny and fail Jesus. All of the other disciples – John included – abandoned Jesus at the point of His greatest need. They all miserably failed Jesus. Jesus knew it would happen. He said, “Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, “God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”.... (And when Jesus was arrested, what happened?) At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.” (Mt 26:31, 56 NLT) Who would blame Jesus for writing John off? With friends like John who needs enemies. But God’s love is stronger than you think.

Here’s the lesson for you and me. God’s love is always stronger than your failures. At some point over the next few hours, John decided to stand with Jesus and be with Him come what may. We find him next to Mary looking up at his crucified teacher and friend. It’s impossible to imagine how miserable John must have been then. Not only was the One he loved most on this Earth – Jesus – dying a horrible death right before his very own eyes, but how ashamed he must have felt for failing Jesus so badly. Jesus had every right to reject Him. Mary had every right to turn away from John. So why was John there at the cross? Because he loved Jesus. Love compelled him.

There’s a bit of John in each of us here today. All of us have failed the Lord Jesus Christ. Every sin you commit is a denial of him. Each of us have abandoned Him at different points in our lives – some for a day, some for years. But here’s what this scene says to me. God’s love is stronger than you think. It’s stronger than any failure, any denial, any abandonment. Despite it all – just like John – you can come back and

be with Jesus. If you love Jesus, come back and stand with Jesus at the cross. Love Him. Identify with Him. Did Jesus rebuke John? Reject John? Humiliate or disown John? No, indeed. Instead Jesus entrusted John with a great privilege and a great task. He entrusted Mary into his care. That's what happens when we come back to the cross of Jesus as well. Not rebuke. Not rejection. And because the love of God is so strong, Jesus instead will entrust you with some great privilege and some great task.

Thomas Edison and his staff were developing the incandescent light bulb. It took hundreds of hours to manufacture a single bulb. One day, after finishing a bulb, Edison handed it to a young errand boy and asked him to take it upstairs to the testing room. As the boy started up the stairs, he stumbled and fell. The precious bulb shattered to pieces on the steps. Instead of rebuking the boy, Edison reassured him and then turned to his staff and told them to start working on another bulb. When it was completed several days later, Edison did something truly remarkable. He walked over to the same boy, handed him the bulb, and said, "Please take this up to the testing room." Can you imagine how that boy must have felt? He knew he didn't deserve to be trusted with that responsibility ever again. Yet, here it was being offered to him again as though nothing had even happened. God's love is like that. It's stronger than you think. It's bigger than your failures. Instead of rejection, Jesus offers you a great privilege, a great task, and above all, a great relationship with Him now and forever. Let's move on and reflect on another of Jesus' statements before He died - the second word of need.

### **WHAT DID JESUS' NEED REVEAL?**

"I am thirsty." (Jo. 19:28 NLT) Of all Jesus' statements as He hung on the cross, this one we understand the most. When Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing" or "I assure you, today you will be with Me in paradise," you realize you're hearing the words of no ordinary human being. Everyone here has been thirsty. We've all said, "I'm thirsty. I need a drink of water." Jesus had probably not had anything to eat or drink since sharing the Passover feast with His disciples the night before. Since then, He'd been whipped, beaten, and crucified. No doubt He was now severely dehydrated and had lost a great deal of blood. Infection may have already begun in His wounds and, as a result, He likely had a fever.

This statement is powerful but necessary evidence Jesus was and is really human. He had human needs just like us. Jesus needed water just like we do. Today, most people accept Jesus was human, but many balk at the truth Jesus was and is God. But in John's day it just the reverse for some. They had little problem with Jesus' deity, but they doubted Jesus was truly a human being. John knew differently. Of the four Gospel writers, only John recorded Jesus' statement, "I am thirsty." It was important to John to point to the fact Jesus was and is both fully God and fully human. Jesus' need underlined His essential humanity. In order for Jesus to redeem us, He had to become one of us. Our salvation depends on Jesus being truly and fully human.

Let's appreciate the fact Jesus endured an intense, overwhelmingly thirst for actual water. But there's also such a thing as spiritual thirst. Jesus needed above all to fulfill

His Father's will. Don't overlook what is written just before Jesus' statement, "Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, 'I am thirsty.'" (Jo 19:28 NLT) What was happening to Jesus wasn't a mistake. He wasn't a helpless victim. Actually, His Father was in control of the situation. Jesus knew why He was dying. The mission was crystal clear. Death came as no surprise to Jesus. The cross wasn't a shock. In a very real sense, Jesus intensely desired – He thirsted spiritually – to complete the work His Father had given Him to do. Jesus was thirsty to pay the price necessary for us to be reconciled to His Father. Jesus was thirsty to drink completely the cup of judgment His Father had given Him so we wouldn't have to drink it. Jesus could have called down countless angels to rescue Him at that very moment, but that wasn't His mission. Jesus thirsted above all to fulfill His Father's will.

Some years ago now I visited Quebec City and saw some of the historic sites. An epic battle was fought there between the English and the French that decisively threw the balance of political power in North America to England. French troops held strong positions overlooking Quebec City. The English general, James Wolfe, decided on a very risky, bold military maneuver. With a numerically smaller force, he made his way through a ravine and up the walls of a cliff to an area called the Plains of Abraham. He surprised the French army and went on to win Canada for England. But it was a fierce battle and Wolfe was mortally wounded. As he lay dying, he heard one of his soldiers yell, "They run; see they run!" Wolfe asked, "Who runs?" Back came the response, "The enemy, sir. They give way everywhere." After giving a few final orders, Wolfe said, "Now, God be praised, I will die in peace." Ironically, General James Wolfe both conquered and died on the very same day.

Someone else conquered and died on the same day. Jesus. He knew victory was near even though He also knew His death was near. It's almost as if the Father said to Him, "My Son, everywhere they run. The enemy is completely defeated. Satan is in full retreat. Look at him run away! The way is now open. Salvation has been won!" Perhaps Jesus said in His own spirit, "If that's the case, My mission is accomplished. God be praised, I will die in peace. Give me a drink so I can shout out, 'It is finished!'" That's exactly what Jesus did say in the next verse – another statement we will reflect on in a couple of weeks from now. Jesus conquered and died on the very same day.

When you enter into a relationship with Jesus, your own spiritual thirst gets quenched. Your need for forgiveness, love, grace, meaning, purpose, connection with God gets satisfied. It's as if the cross of Jesus becomes like a fountain of cold, clear spiritual water for your soul. God's love refreshes, renews, and reinvigorates you. But here's something ironic. When you surrender your heart and live to Jesus there's also a new thirsting for God and a thirsting after God that is quickened rather than quenched. This is a good and wonderful thing. The psalmist said, "As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God.... O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water." (Ps 42:1-2, 63:1 NLT)

Do you thirst for more of God in your life? Is your appetite for the things of God getting bigger rather than less? C.S. Lewis made an observation that challenges me, “Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” Isn’t that the truth sometimes? We are far too easily pleased. If you’re a follower of Jesus today, but there’s very little hunger or thirst in your life for more of God, you need to be concerned. It’s not spiritually healthy. Yes, God does quench one kind of spiritual thirst, but He quickens another. God always wants us to be spiritually hungry and thirsty for Him.

A final thought about spiritual thirst. The thirstier for God you get, the more you thirst to see other people discover the water of eternal life. Jesus thirsted to see lost people discover an eternal relationship with His Father. Do you? When you become a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will quicken within you a thirst for more of God, true enough. But He will also increase your thirst to see other people discover Jesus for themselves. So how can God use you and me to quench a thirst for God among lost people? It begins when God puts a specific lost person on your heart. Don’t be surprised to discover God has already started to make that person spiritually thirsty for Him. You begin to pray for that person. You take the initiative to develop a friendship. Once trust has been established, you look for an opportunity to get into a spiritual conversation and it goes from there. First, God quenches your spiritual thirst. Then He quickens a new spiritual thirst within you for more of Him. Part of that new thirst is to see lost people come to Jesus so they can get their spiritual thirst quenched, too.

Do you know what this church needs to be to the Northland community around us? A great, big spiritual water fountain. People need Jesus spiritually as much as they need water physically. There’s a lot of people dying of spiritual thirst in and around KRBC this morning. Many of them don’t even know they’re thirsty for Jesus; they just know they’re thirsty. They sense their own spiritual dehydration at some level. My hope and prayer for this church for the last 15 years I’ve served as your pastor is that we can share the Water of Life with them. It will still be my hope and prayer for you when I retire later this year and you have a new pastor. May this church always be about offering Jesus to spiritually thirsty people. What did our Lord say? “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, “Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.”” (Jo 7:37-38 NLT)

Did you hear about the scientists who decided to develop a fish that could live outside of water? They bred, crossbred, hormonized, and chromosomed until they produced a fish that could exist outside of water. But they weren’t satisfied. They suspected that though this fish had learned how to live on dry land, it still might have a secret desire for water. So again they went to work, this time retraining the fish’s strongest instincts. The result? They created a fish that would rather die than get wet. Even humidity filled this new, land-loving fish with dread. These scientists were so proud of what they’d accomplished they took the fish on tour. Quite accidentally, however, it happened. The fish somehow managed to fall into a random lake. It sank to the bottom, eyes and gills

clamped shut, afraid to move lest it become wetter. Of course, it dared not breathe. Every instinct said no. But it had to breathe! So the fish took a tentative gill full of water. Its eyes bulged. It breathed again and flicked a fin. It breathed a third time and wriggled with delight. Then it darted away. Low and behold, the fish had discovered water. It was one very happy fish!

That's one very silly story. A fable. But it makes a valid point. The world around us has conditioned you and me to think we can exist just fine without God even though we were created by God and for God. It will even try to remove any need for God from our hearts. But once you discover God – once you fall into Him like that fish fell into the lake's water – you realize this is what and Who you were made for. This is where you are meant to live, move, and have your being. The One who cried out from the cross, "I am thirsty," is the same One who says to you and me, "Those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." (John 4:13-14 NLT)