

Standing in the Pain

1. Warm-up question: Families are complicated, families are weird, families have issues. What's something quirky or weird about your family of origin?

2. Jesus also had a complicated family. His earthly father, Joseph, appears to have died early. Jesus had four brothers and an unspecified number of sisters. The names of his brothers were James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. Mark 6:3. His sisters aren't named. In Mark 3, we're told that Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters thought Jesus was saying crazy things and on the wrong track, so they tried "to restrain him." That seems to have caused a break between Jesus and his family. At this point Mary disappears from Jesus' story. Jesus' brothers reemerge in John 7 when they question his authenticity and dare him to travel to Jerusalem even though they know it was dangerous for him to do so. That passage tells us, "Not even his brothers believed in him." John 7:3. From that point forward, nothing more is heard from Jesus' family until Mary appears at his crucifixion. Then, after Jesus arose, we're told that Mary began gathering with, and counting herself among, the followers of Jesus. Acts 1:14. After Jesus appeared to his brother James, James also became a believer and a leader in the early church. I Corinthians 15:7. And later several of Jesus' other brothers also became traveling evangelists sharing Jesus' message. II Corinthians 9:5.
 - a. When you hear the foregoing story of Jesus' family, what most strikes you or intrigues you about it?
 - b. Does it feel strange to think of Jesus as having a family with normal problems and challenges? If so, why does it feel strange? Are you glad Jesus had a family with normal problems?
 - c. The fundamental point of conflict in Jesus' family appears to have been their disapproval of how Jesus conducted his ministry. What was the most difficult problem or conflict your family of origin faced? How did that affect you?
 - d. Mary appears to have always believed Jesus was the Messiah, but disagreed with how Jesus was approaching that calling. We don't know precisely when Mary reconciled with Jesus and embraced the fullness of his calling. There are three possibilities: (a) during Jesus' public ministry after Mark 3 but before the crucifixion; (b) at the crucifixion; or (c) after the resurrection. If you had to guess which of these possibilities is most likely, which would you choose – and why?

3. On Sunday, we focused our attention on Mary's reappearance at the cross. Let's read together John 19, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Frederick Farrar describes the horrors of crucifixion as including "dizziness, cramps, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, public shame, the horror of anticipation, and gashing wounds," so intense it felt unbearable, but not intense enough to give the relief of unconsciousness. It took hours, sometimes a full 24

hours, for a crucified person to die. Imagine how Mary must have felt. For those in your group who are parents, describe for the group what it would feel like if you had to watch your child be crucified.

- b. Although it must have been unbearable to witness her son's crucifixion, imagine what Mary's presence meant to Jesus in his hour of greatest need. When Jesus looked up and saw his mother there, what do you imagine he felt and thought?
 - c. Jeff reminded us that when George Floyd was being murdered, he instinctively cried out for his mother. Jeff said that when his time comes, he hopes God sends his mother to be a comforting spirit to help him through the valley of the shadow of death. Do you think God sends people back to help us in our hour of extremis? If so, and you could choose, who would you want to come for you – and why?
4. John 19:25 tells us that Mary was “standing near the cross of Jesus. . . .” In a scholarly paper, Mary Garcia focuses on the significance of the Greek word for “standing,” which implies a steadfast planting of one's self in a difficult place. Garcia says, “Suffering is not something that attracts us. When confronted by suffering, it is hard to stay firm, that is, to ‘stand.’ We are not just talking about the physical aspect of standing, but the spiritual one, especially for a mother who is watching her son die. Hence, this passage is saying something about how love responds to suffering.” In other words, the love of God compels us to enter into the pain of others and stand with them in the pain, rather than running from it. Being emotionally present with someone in their suffering is one of the greatest gifts we can ever give.
- a. The Bible says, “Weep with those who weep.” Romans 12:15. What do you think that means? Put it in your own words. And what are some examples of what it means to do the opposite, i.e., to not weep with those who weep?
 - b. Tell us about a time you were able to truly stand with someone in their pain. How did your presence affect them? How did it affect you?
 - c. When people are in pain, we often want to hurry up and fix them, so we don't have to feel their pain. So we often have a tendency to spout pious platitudes or tell them what they should do to get beyond their pain. As a result, they end up feeling even more isolated and alone. Instead, Jeff shared a three part model we can follow when we're trying to be present with someone in their pain. Take a look at the model on p. 3 then tell us: What do you think of this model? What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
 - d. Is there someone in your life right now who needs you to stand with them in their pain? Who are they? What are they facing? What the hardest thing about entering into their pain? Do you think you have the wherewithal to stand with them?

John 19:16-30, selected verses

16 Then Jesus was handed over to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; 17 and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him. 19 Pilate had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier.

25 Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home.

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

How To Stand With People In Their Pain

Step 1 – Enter into their pain. Or to put it more bluntly, shut up and listen! Don't try to short-circuit the conversation by jumping ahead and telling them how to fix their pain. Instead, take the time to hear what's going on from their perspective and to explore how they're feeling about it. Ask lots of questions like: Tell me what's going on? What happened next? How does that make you feel? Let them tell their story, don't rush it. Feel their pain.

Step 2 – Ask questions to help them discover their way forward. Not *your* way, *theirs*. Your answer may not be theirs. They need to discover for themselves how to move forward and your job is simply to help them think it through. So ask questions like: What do you think you should do? What do you sense God wants you to do?

Step 3 – Ask if it's ok for you to share some observations. Now that you've entered their pain, heard them out, and let them take it as far as they can, you've earned the right to offer any thoughts God has laid on your heart, and because they feel how much you care, now maybe they can hear you.