

Famous Last Words: Take Care of Her

John 19:25-27

The Last Lecture

Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg has a practice of offering retiring professors or those who leave for some other reason the opportunity to give what they formally call, "*The Last Lecture.*"

The charge is this, "*If this were your last lecture, what would you say?*"

About ten years ago, Randy Pausch, a popular professor of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon gave his "*last lecture.*"

At the time Randy was about forty and a father of three young children. He had also been recently diagnosed with terminal cancer.

His "*last lecture*" has been viewed by millions on the internet. He even made an appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

He parlayed all of that into a book that reached # 1 on the *New York Times Bestseller List*.

In his lecture Randy didn't so much talk about death, but life and how to live it. He even did a set of pushups.

He was quick to admit that the lecture was essentially for his kids.

"I really didn't write the lecture for the 400 or so who first heard it at Carnegie Mellon," Randy said later. *"Nor did I write it for the numbers of people who have seen it on the internet. I wrote this lecture for three people alone, my children. And when they're older, they will watch it."*

"It's not about how to achieve your dreams," he said, *"it's about how to lead your life. If you lead your life the right way, the dreams will come to you."* Randy Pausch

Randy was a shining example of a father wanting to take care of his children. Even though he was not with them very long, he wanted to make sure they at least knew the values by which he lived.

Making Things Right

When death looms, we want to do everything in our power to make sure that those we love are taken care of.

A good deal of time and attention is spent making sure our affairs are in order.

We also tend to things relationally. We share last words. We seek forgiveness where forgiveness is warranted.

We tell those closest to us that we love them, which begs the question why we don't do that all the time.

There's just something in us that wants to make things right when death comes knocking. Ironically, we have every opportunity to do just that when our loved ones are still around.

Preparing His Disciples

If you and I are apt to care for those we love at a time of death, we should not be surprised that Jesus was quick to do that as well.

Before his death, Jesus spent a good deal of time preparing those around him for what was to come. We find him doing that all through his life and ministry, but no more pointedly as recorded in John 13-17.

In fact, the Gospel of John moves with due haste to record the last week of Christ's life. Of the twenty-one chapters in John, nine record his last week here on earth and, in the mix of that Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to come.

Taking Care of His Mother

John not only records what Jesus did in preparing his disciples, he also shares a touching moment where he seeks to care for his mom. He wanted to make sure she would be well-cared for after he was gone.

Jesus was no different than we are in caring for those closest to us. We find this no more clearly demonstrated than when he offered a loving, last word in support of Mary.

Christ's so-called third word was offered from the cross and of the seven he offered, it is his most personal.

Christ's first word was offered to everyone. "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" As we said on Ash Wednesday, even we're included.

Christ's second word was spoken to one of the criminals who was crucified right next to him. "*Today, you will be with me in paradise*" rings through the ages and heartens us to no end about eternal life.

Christ's third word was offered to those closest to him. In speaking that word, Jesus wanted to make sure he had dealt with the most important relationships in his life.

As John records, Jesus' mother Mary, his mother's sister, Salome, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene had gathered near the cross. John, "*the one Jesus loved*" was also there. We can only begin to imagine the agony they all felt.

The focus of that tremendously intimate scene was upon Mary, the mother of Jesus and John, his beloved disciple.

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'"

As we said just a bit earlier, Jesus wanted to make sure that his mother was well-cared for and John was just the person to make that happen.

If anything, Jesus knew the two would be good for one another, particularly as they lived into the grief of his death and later the exuberance of his resurrection.

The heartening thing for you and me in this, and I don't think it is a stretch, is that if Jesus wanted to make sure Mary was well-cared for, we can be well-assured that he wants to make sure we are also well-cared for.

All Was Not Lost

In speaking this third word, Jesus wanted to communicate to his mother that all was not lost.

Remember she was the one who from the very beginning had "*pondered all these things in her heart.*"

Even before her son was born Mary knew God was acting in a powerful way. Now as he hung from the cross she had to be reminded of that.

The grief of losing a loved one is tough enough. The grief of losing a child is the toughest of all. And for Mary to have followed Jesus all along and for it to have come to this surely called her to question what in the world God was up to.

By asking John to help out as he did, Jesus, in his own way, was trying to re-assure Mary that everything was going to be okay.

As we have come to experience, Christ's death paved the way for God's forgiveness. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, you and I, as well as all who put their faith in him are forgiven, redeemed, and restored.

A Reason to Move On

Not only did Jesus have a word for Mary, but he also had a word for his buddy, John.

Jesus knew that John would also be devastated by his death. He knew his grief would be overwhelming. Jesus has a way of knowing our pain.

Jesus though charged John to carry on even in the mix of that grief. Jesus helped John to do that by giving him something to do and, as we know from scripture, John followed through in a big way.

The scripture is clear, *“From that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”*

When overcome with grief, having something to do can provide a reason to carry on.

The same is true when one’s focus is upon other people.

In dealing with grief, taking the focus off ourselves and putting it on others is always helpful. That’s why it is so important for those grieving to stay connected with the people around them.

The death of a loved one often leaves us with a deep sense that life is no longer worth living. We can very easily lose a sense of meaning and purpose.

That’s why Jesus was quick to give call on John to care for his mom.

Of course, as we well know the grief over Jesus’ death was short-lived. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead, offering good news to all who grieve.

Nearby

There is a key word in our passage for today and I’d be amiss if I didn’t mention it. It’s the word, *“nearby.”*

*“Standing **near** the cross of Jesus were his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”*

The fact is this, standing **near** the cross puts us in the position of understanding who and what is most important. When we stand **near** the cross everything else is put in right perspective.

When we stand **near** the cross, life is strengthened, and relationships are re-defined. That’s certainly true for our relationships with God. It’s also true for our relationships with others.

The design of the cross reminds of that. The cross is both vertical and horizontal.

When we stand at the foot of the cross and experience what Christ has done, we can’t help but be affected.

We experience his love and are influenced by that to no end. We are not only reconciled to God, but to one another.

We live in the assurance that if our relationships with God can be restored, then the relationships we have with other people can be restored as well.

The call then is to stand **near** the cross and, by so doing, find ourselves drawing near not only to God, but one another.

Look Out for One Another

There's just something in us that draws us to tend to the needs of those we love the most.

Moms and dads are constantly looking out for the welfare of their children, but as we have come to know from the college admission scandals this week there are limits to that.

Even still, it's just in us to do well by our children.

In the same vein sons and daughters are quick to help out their parents when needed. I know Cheryl and I have tried to be there for our parents. It's not always been easy or clear cut, but we have at least tried.

Presently, my brother is living with my mom with an interest of squeezing out as much independence as we can out of her life. I know it has not been easy.

Jesus' third word from the cross is a word for you and me. Look out for one another.

Parents look out for your children. Children look out for your parents.

To everyone, look out for one another, particularly for those who have a hard time looking out for themselves.

If last words are words we need to heed, we do well to heed what Jesus is trying to tell us with these last words.

Let's do what we can to support one another in love. That's certainly going to take sacrifice, involve a great deal of risk, and demand a lot of us.

That's the way it is though when we chose to look out for one another, when we choose to love.