



## Invitation to family 'Woman receive your son'

### Week 4

#### Introduction

'Do you think it would be ok to call them Mum and Dad?' The first time this question was posed to me years ago by one of my early foster sons it rather of took me by surprise. He was sitting nervously in the back of the car as I drove him to the home of what would be his forever family. The question brought tears to my eyes as I drove, and is one that stays with me this Mothering Sunday. I thought about his birth parents who would continue to see him from time to time. They couldn't care for him, but they did love him. I thought about his adoptive parents and the loving preparations they had made in order to make this little boy feel at home with them. And I thought of my wife and I who had effectively been his mum and dad for the previous year. We had collected him from school, taught him to ride a bike, nursed him while he was ill, laughed and cried with him, and thrown parties for him. And now we had to say goodbye. This new start – this adoption – was a strange mix of grief and joy.

Understanding this makes Jesus' fourth words from the cross especially meaningful. At a time of great distress, Jesus comforts his mum and his friend by pronouncing them mother and son. As if dying for the sins of the world were not a big enough task, even as he dies Jesus secures temporal hospitality for those closest to him. In this simple yet significant act Jesus is promoting the hospitality that God has always advocated by 'setting the lonely in families' (Psalm 68.6).

#### Prayer

*Lord God, thank you for the families you have placed us in, and for those who love, support, encourage and care for us. Thank you for your loving care too, Father, and for adopting us as your children. Despite the mess we were in, you welcomed us into your family. Please give us open hearts to all you have to say to us today. Amen.*

#### Setting the scene

Jesus, the Son of God who has done nothing wrong, is dying for the sins of the world. But in the midst of unimaginable pain and agony while hanging on the cross, he still makes time to sort out his family arrangements. There has been a strange tension in the Gospels regarding Jesus and family. First, Jesus calls believers to be willing to leave their families and follow him, recognising that faith sometimes divides families. But Jesus also challenges those who would abdicate family responsibilities, criticising those who redirected family pension funds into the temple.

However, Jesus also teaches that our fellow believers are our eternal family and sometimes they need to be prioritised. There is something beautiful in how Jesus brings together his disciple and his mother, to care for one another in their mutual loss, to show hospitality to one another for the future, to counter the loneliness in each that their bereavement may cause.

### John 19.25–27

*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 her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

### Focus

While dying in order that he could welcome the world into his eternal family, Jesus offers a taster of that adoption by bringing together two of his nearest and dearest. What happened to Jesus' brothers, the natural-born sons that Joseph and Mary had together, is uncertain. Perhaps they were still estranged from Jesus, or perhaps they were just not in Jerusalem at the time.

Nevertheless, it brings home the truth that at the cross Jesus enables people to be reconciled both to God and to one another.

What Jesus does spiritually he also does practically. He offers the water of life, but also provides water at a wedding. He feeds people's souls and their bodies. He adopts us into his heavenly family and makes sure the vulnerable can also find new families here on earth. Jesus was not too spiritual or too busy or too distracted to care for those in need around him.

I find this very challenging. In the light of needs around me it is very easy for me to make all kinds of excuses. But because Jesus has adopted me into his family, I have to make sure – one way or another, through friendship, hospitality and care – I am open to welcoming others into my family.

### Personal reflection questions

1. Why does Jesus make this formal pronouncement about his mother and his friend John? What does it say about his understanding of his role as God's Son, and as Mary's son?
2. How does this invitation to John and Mary illustrate the work of the cross? How does the picture of adoption help you to understand and appreciate your salvation?
3. As part of an earthly family, what positive attitudes does Jesus model here? How can we incorporate these into our own family lives?
4. Why were widows and orphans particularly vulnerable in the ancient world? Who are the equivalent people in our society today who are most vulnerable?
5. There are a lot of children waiting for adoption in the UK. For example, currently on the Adoption Register in England there are nearly three times as many children waiting to be adopted as families looking to adopt. What do you think the Church's role could be in responding to this need?<sup>1</sup>
6. How can we, as a Church, extend an invitation to others to join our spiritual family, and also help find physical homes for those who need one?

<sup>1</sup> [adoptionmatch.org.uk/statistics](http://adoptionmatch.org.uk/statistics)

## Final thoughts

There is never an adoption without a tragic story of family breakdown and loss. However through adoption, there is the hope for the future, a welcome into a new family, and a beautiful picture of belonging and acceptance. My youngest daughter loves it that I can say uniquely about her that I chose her. Despite the messiness of the circumstances, and the unknowns for the future, I jumped over all sorts of hurdles to secure her place in our family. Adoption is a wonderful illustration of our acceptance into God's family. He chose us to be with him forever.

## Closing prayer

Father God, thank you that even as Jesus died on the cross he was caring for the practical and emotional needs of those around him. Thank you that you offer to adopt us into your family. Thank for this the highest privilege you can give to us, that we can be your sons and daughters and know you as our loving heavenly father. In our nation where so many children in care wait for adopted families help us to know how you would have us respond to their needs. In the name of Jesus, Amen.