

St John, Evangelist and Apostle 2020

This ancient Feast Day, one of a sequence following Christmas, has been celebrated since the early centuries. Following St Stephen's Day, and followed by The Holy Innocents, its importance was marked by the Roman calendar as one which had its own 'octave' – it was celebrated a whole week until the reforms of the 1960s, so important was it regarded.

Why is this? I think it was a recognition of the radiant nature of both the Gospel and the Letters of John. To this for many centuries was also tied the Revelation of St John the Divine. However, we now know considerably more about the New Testament through modern Biblical scholarship. It is unlikely that the Revelation is from the hand of the person or persons who wrote the Gospel and Letters, although we can certainly say that the Gospel and letters come from the same community – sometimes called the Johannine Community – a small group of early Christians who were much persecuted. More of that anon.

Does it matter that we cast doubt on the authorship of these works, both together or singly? I don't think so. We honour whoever composed such wonderful works, and tradition allows us to honour them in the name of John – Evangelist and Apostle.

The wonderful nature of both Gospel and Letters is the way in which we are drawn into the world of John. In spite of fierce persecution, particularly from Jewish authorities themselves trying to rebuild the shattered remnants of their worship and faith, the marker which both Gospel and Letters display vividly is the strong sense of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ, together with a call – even summons to love in the face of hatred. Through Jesus, the lodestar of Faith is found in the God in whom there is no darkness at all. Despite an element of dualism we might see – spirit-led lives, good, lives of the flesh, bad, in fact ultimately, I think we may say that John views the world as ultimately good because God is at the heart of creation. We are called to work at Faith. It is not some breezy life easily put on. It requires constant work. However, because Jesus has forged a new heaven and a new earth, wrought for each of us – in seeking to follow him, we find the fulness of life if we journey faithfully.

In our Gospel reading, we are on the beach after the Resurrection and the Lord has previously charged Peter to lead the disciples as a shepherd. It is such a moving account. Peter, true to form, almost loses his temper when asked in triplicate (as it were!). It is followed by the mysterious passage we heard of the disciple who lay on the bosom of the Lord at the Last Supper. 'What about him,' asks Peter. Whilst Jesus doesn't say 'Mind your own business,' he DOES lead Peter on a further journey. It is the call to follow Jesus which draws us to imitate his self-giving love; a reckless, overflowing love at work within the world. In doing so, we are called to know that in living out this love, the possibilities are endless. That wonderful end to the chapter is John's take on what Jesus achieved in his ministry: *'But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.'*

This is our call too, as brothers and sisters in Christ; helping to reveal the Kingdom Life in all we do. In this is the beauty of John's understanding that in following Christ, we have the same capacity to bring his light into the world; to transform lives whilst being transformed ourselves.



Vladimir Borovikovsky (Владі́мир Луки́ч Боровико́вский) 1757 - 1825, St. Petersburg) Kazan Cathedral, St Petersburg

Exodus 33: 7-11a

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance of their tents. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

1 John Chapter 1

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John 21: 19b-end

Jesus said to Peter, 'Follow me.'

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.