

We Know

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. [Amen].

Our text for the commemoration of St John Apostle and Evangelist is from the Gospel according to John in the 21st chapter:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.¹

The Apostle and Evangelist John is one of those Saints that most of us probably know better than others. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that John was a Galilean fisherman, and one of the first disciples, along with his brother James, to be called by Jesus.

We know that from early on John made up part of Christ's inner circle. It was Peter, James and John alone who were allowed to follow Jesus when He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. They were the only ones who went with Christ on the mount of Transfiguration and there beheld His glory; and they were the ones who went the furthest with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and there beheld His humiliation and suffering.

We know that despite being depicted as the more delicate disciple, like in the painting of the Last Supper in the Bible Study room, the Gospels tell us that John and his brother James were called the "Sons of Thunder." When the same James and John went to Samaria to secure lodging and were turned away, in anger they asked Christ if they should call down fire from heaven to consume it. It was the Sons of Thunder who plotted to sit at Christ's right and left hand in His kingdom, albeit through the mediation of their mother. So, even though Peter might have been the rock who always charged in head first, we know that John had his fiery moments too.

We also know that John was close to Christ in a way different than all the other disciples, even among the inner three. It was John who leaned against Christ's breast in the Upper Room on the night He was betrayed. John was the only Apostle who followed Jesus all the way to cross. He was the one whom Christ appointed to look after His mother, Mary. It was John who outran Peter to the tomb on Easter Morning and first saw the linen cloths proclaiming Christ's resurrection. Even though Christ loved all of the Twelve, as He loves all people, we know that it was John alone who bore the title "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

¹ John 21:24.

So, as an Apostle of Jesus, we know John fairly well; yet, our knowledge of him doesn't just end there. We also know John as an Evangelist. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit John authored a Gospel, three letters to the Church and a Revelation from God.

John's Gospel, which is many people's favorite, bears witness to Christ with both simplicity and profoundness. It has both the easiest Greek in the New Testament and some of the most challenging theology. John's Gospel, more than any other book of the Bible, best captures the words of St. Augustine that "the Scriptures are shallow enough for a child not to drown, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim."

John is a popular author. His Revelation is easily the most requested book for Bible studies and his Epistles, like the one from our reading today, are even quoted in the Lutheran liturgy. So, for all these reasons, it's safe to say that in some way we know St John the Apostle and Evangelist.

Getting to our text though, the truth of the matter is that Peter knew John even better than we do. As we heard earlier, Peter was with John from the beginning. Peter was there when John was called into discipleship and he was there with John for almost every major moment in Jesus' ministry – the Transfiguration, the Upper Room, Gethsemane, even Easter Morning. If we know John from the synoptic Gospels and from his own writings, we can be assured that Peter knew him even better.

But our text today tells us that Peter wanted to know more. After hearing of his own death through which he would glorify God, Peter asked the question in reference to John:

*"Lord, what about this man?"*²

To put it bluntly, through comparing himself to another, Peter here fosters the spirit of discontentment and sows the seed of envy. This, of course, makes the law application from today's text a pretty obvious one.

Envy is a pointless sin. Like its counterpart worrying, nobody changes their circumstance positively through jealousy. The temptation is to think that if we had what others had, life would be better. The poor envy the wealthy, thinking that happiness goes hand in hand with money, even though most lottery winners end up broke and friendless. The unpopular envy the popular, forgetting that it's the ones in the spotlight who get torn apart by gossip. Married couples envy the spouse of another, thinking that if only their husband would listen or their wife would work

² John 21:21.

harder than they'd be happy. And here in our text it seems that Peter envies John, thinking that a long life is in some way better than being martyred.

The temptation that Peter faced is the temptation to think that you have it hard and others have it easy. It is the temptation to overlook that which God has specifically given to you for your good and instead to fixate on what God has given to another for their good. Envy is one of those sins born from the lie that we, more than God, actually know what's best for us. And so, ultimately, envy makes us forget the truth that God knows us and loves us better than we know and love ourselves.

Jesus responds to your envy and discontentment akin to the rebuke of parents and teachers everywhere,

"...if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"³

AKA, "Mind your own business."

Really, the overarching point from our text today is that Jesus knows what's best. Christ knows you, and more importantly, He loves you in the exact way that you need to be loved. Despite what today's spirit of egalitarianism and equality would have you believe, God's love is not some stale, generic, cookie-cutter love. God does not love everyone the same.

This doesn't mean that He loves some more than others. It means that His love is unique. The Psalmist reminds us that,

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.⁴

Even as He knew you before you were born, so now, Christ knows the secret thoughts of your heart and what you do behind closed doors. He is aware of your greatest faults, your deepest shame and your constant struggles. As Christ counts every hair on your head, so also, he knows your greatest needs.

John ends his Gospel account by telling us something very close to what Christ once spoke to the prying Peter:

³ John 21:22.

⁴ Psalm 139:16.

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”⁵

Just as Peter didn't get to know everything he wanted to about John, we don't get to know everything we want to about Christ. We don't get to know how specifically Christ will work in our lives to bring about His good and gracious will. We don't know if our sickness will be healed. We don't know if our family disputes will end peacefully or end at all. We don't know if our loved ones who have fallen from the Faith will return to the Church. We don't know with what type of death we will glorify God – if we'll be martyred young or die alone in old age. We don't know if Jesus will come back today or tomorrow or the next day. John tells us that there are many things that Jesus has done, is doing and will do that we know nothing about.

But even though we don't know many of the things we wish we did, what we do know are those things that men like John the Apostle and Evangelist have borne witness to and written down for our sakes. We know that Christ is both God and man, both born from an earthly mother in time, and born of His Heavenly Father from all eternity. We know that Jesus turned water into wine, healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind and raised men from the dead. We know that though He was tempted in every way, Christ remained free from sin – and yet, though He knew no sin, He was made sin for us. From the witness of John himself we know that when the soldier pierced Christ's lifeless body on the cross, there from His side poured out blood and water striking the earth and welling forth in righteousness for all people. We know that even as the dying Jesus cried *“It is finished,”*⁶ so too, on the Day of the Resurrection he appeared to His disciples saying, *“Peace be with you.”*⁷ John witnessed these things with his own eyes and touched the Word of life with his own hands and we know that his testimony is true.

The testimony of John is that even if you don't know Christ as much as you want to, Christ knows you. He knows you, and so He loves you in the exact way you need to be loved. He forgives your sins, even those done in secret and He daily and richly provides you with all that you need for this body and life. As John says in our Epistle reading,

⁵ John 21:25.

⁶ John 19:30.

⁷ John 20:19

We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.⁸

Christ is our propitiation in that He saves us from the wrath of God, sin, death and hell by his blood...

What this means for present sufferings is that even if you don't know how, the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus at the right hand of His Father, is interceding on your behalf and working all things for your good. So, yes, the days ahead may get worse instead of better, and yes, there might be more grief and pain still to come. But God will use it for good.

John is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.⁹

Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [Amen].

Feast of St John Apostle and Evangelist

John 21:20-25; Psalm 78: 1-8; John 1:1-2:2; Revelation 1:1-61

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⁸ 1 John 2:2-3

⁹ John 21:24.