

A Sermon for 27th December 2020 – 1 John 1: 1-10 and John 21: 19b-25

Both our readings today are thought to be written by the same person, John – “the beloved disciple of Jesus.” In our Gospel reading today, Peter asks Jesus what is going to happen to the Apostle John. We need to look at the previous verses to put this part of the reading into context. Peter had been fishing with the other disciples and had caught nothing. When they were told by someone on the shore to cast the net on the right side of the boat the net filled with fish. Then John told Peter it was Jesus who stood on the shore, and Peter who immediately jumped over the side of the boat and went towards Jesus. They landed the catch and had a breakfast of bread and some of the fish they had caught. Since Peter's denials were public knowledge, he needed to be publicly restored. The other disciples needed to hear Peter's reaffirmation of his love for Christ and Christ's recommissioning of him, so they would willingly and loyally support his leadership.

As soon as they had finished breakfast, Jesus initiated the restoration by confronting Peter. Three times Jesus repeats the essential question, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter had denied the Lord three times and so these three questions hit Peter like repeated hammer blows to drive the point home. Three times, the third time with grief because it reminded him of his threefold denials, Peter affirmed, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” And, three times the Lord responded to Peter's affirmation of love with, “Tend My lambs. ... Shepherd My sheep. ... Tend My sheep.” The point is, loving Jesus because He has forgiven all your sins is essential for serving Him. Because he loves, Peter is reinstated, and given a great responsibility to care for the early Christian community. In the next verse Jesus told Peter that he was going to die for the Lord. Was that a horrible thing to hear? Would it be for you if you were in Peter's place? But what a wonderful piece of prophecy it was for Peter! Jesus was telling Peter that not only was he forgiven but he was going to have faith great enough to be the kind of man he thought himself to be when he said, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You” (Matt. 26:35). He didn't die with Jesus, but he knew now he was going to be allowed another chance; to live for Him, and that he would eventually die for Jesus. We can only imagine the joy and relief that he felt!

Peter now knows what was to happen to him and sees John., and asked “ Lord what about him?” And stunningly, Jesus rebukes Peter and basically tells him to mind his own business. I wonder why Peter asked the question, because John's Gospel doesn't tell us why he did. Perhaps Peter was simply being nosy. Maybe Peter wants to use his privileged position to find out about others. Aren't we all a lot like Peter in asking "What about this man?" It is so easy to let our relationship with the Lord be overly influenced by the behaviour and experiences of others. But we must not be concerned with what God has planned for anyone else. Through the conflicting voices that surround us, we must keep hearing the Saviour's clear command: “You follow Me.” Are you fixing your eyes on Jesus or on His work in and through other saints? The former focus will assure a race well done, while the latter focus often leads to frustration, envy, jealousy and failure to finish your (own, not someone else's) race.

Our first reading was from 1John1:1-10. John is writing to Gentile congregations, He calls himself “The Elder” and we don't even discover that much about him unless we read into the second and third letters that bear his name. Elder is an appropriate name for him.

John was an old man. He'd seen a lot happen in his long life. He'd been one of the first followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and he had seen the risen Lord with his own eyes. John had somehow survived the persecutions that had erupted in the early years of the church. Most of the other apostles had died, and a second generation of leaders had stepped up to keep telling the Good News.

Based in Ephesus, John served as the pastor for a network of house churches that were scattered over the region. These were churches that had been established by the Apostle Paul, and now John was left in charge of them. He had already written his account of the Good News, but it had been a few years since those words made their way through the community, encouraging the church with the story of Jesus. In the meantime, false teachers had tried to lead the believing community astray. They had twisted the gospel message, and were teaching people that Jesus had not been a real person. Some had even left the church, following a belief system that would come to be called Gnosticism, after the Greek word 'gnosis' – to know.

In the introduction to his letter John deals with the same subject, and uses several of the same words as in the introduction to his gospel. He proclaimed, that essential Good, that uncreated Excellence, which had been from the **beginning**, from eternity, as equal with the Father, and which in time appeared in human nature for the salvation of sinners. This was the great truth that John wanted his readers to believe. The apostles had seen Him and witnessed his wisdom and holiness, his miracles, and love and mercy, over some three years. They saw him crucified for sinners, and afterwards risen from the dead. They touched him, so as to have full proof of his resurrection. This Divine Person, the **Word** of life, the Word of God, appeared in flesh and blood. A true God and a true man so that he might be the Source and Giver of eternal **life** to mankind, through the redemption of his blood, and the influence of his new-creating Spirit. The apostles declared what they had seen and heard, so that believers might share their comforts and everlasting advantages. They had free access to God the Father. They had a happy experience of the truth in their souls, and showed its excellence in their lives. This communion of believers with the Father and the Son, is begun and kept up by the influences of the Holy Spirit. The benefits Christ bestows, are not like the meagre possessions of the world, causing jealousies in others; but the joy and happiness of communion with God is all-sufficient. Anyone may partake of it; and all who are able to say, that truly their fellowship is with the Father, will desire to lead others to partake of the same blessedness.

What John proclaimed here was the very essence of our faith. His joy in the Lord could not be complete unless his readers shared the true knowledge of the Christ. The forces which seek to overthrow Christian faith today try to undermine our confidence in the facts of Scripture, these great historical truths. That is why it is important that we should believe the story as it is recorded in the Gospels and epistles. We must believe these facts. We cannot believe merely in ideas, doctrinal statements. We must come down at last to factual things, facts, acts of God in history. Amen.