

First Sunday After Christmas, December 28, 2014, Year B

Feast of St. John the Evangelist and Apostle

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 21: 19-25

***"John the Revelator"***

Father we are in awe that you have sent such a wondrous light into the world - that that you sent Him – Jesus your Son to eradicate darkness in the world. Thank you for your Son and the gift that He brings us – eternal life with you and Him. We can through Him receive forgiveness of our sins when we repent. Thank you! As we sang this morning – “Go Tell It On the mountain” and that is just what we are supposed to do – whenever and wherever we are!

To me – one of the most wonderful and powerful chapters in the entire Gospel of John is at the very end – John chapter 21. Let me set the stage: Jesus has been crucified, died, buried, and has risen from the dead. He has appeared to the apostles, proving His Divinity – beyond doubt. In this chapter – we witness Jesus making breakfast for the Apostles at a place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee called Tabgha. Some much happens in this chapter it is absolutely amazing! God likes to use the same place several times in His Holy Word – and Tabgha is one of those. It was there that one of the two feedings of the thousands took place, and so here is the Risen Jesus standing on the shore at this very place making breakfast for the Apostles. He was making bread and fish at Tabgha. I had the privilege of sharing what I have learned about this chapter, and the Lord's work in it – during our trip to Israel in July of this year. Jesus used this place to do several things – at the site of one of the feeding of the thousands, and so much more!

First Jesus inquires of the fishermen if they have caught anything. They replied that they had fished all night and caught nothing. That was the way they caught fish – at night – using light to attract the fish. The Lord tells them to set out again but this time instead of putting their nets down off the left side of the boat, as was the custom, since the Jewish fishermen always pointed their boats north, so that they would catch the Jewish fish on the side of their boat considered the Jewish side of the lake – to lower their nets off the right hand side. The right side was the side of the lake that had the Gadarenes and the Decapolis, and the Golan Heights – considered the Gentile side of the lake. If you recall in Matthew chapter 8, Jesus encountered two violent demon possessed men in the Gadarenes and Jesus drove those demons into a herd of pigs that went into the lake to drown. You would never find pigs on the Jewish side of the lake – they were unclean! As the Apostles lowered their nets they took in a haul of fish that loaded the boat – from the right side – on the Gentile side of the lake – signifying that they were not only fishers of Jewish men, but fishers of Gentiles as well!

That was not the only transformation that would take place that morning, as something amazing would happen to Simon Peter, who if you remember denied Jesus three times on the night that Jesus was arrested. Shortly after those apostles that were present finished eating the bread Jesus had made along with some of the fish they had caught - *"Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said,*

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**"Take care of my sheep."** 17 *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."* (John 21:15-17) There is more happening here than Peter being reinstated three times by Jesus from his denials – for here Jesus is commissioning Peter - from being a fisherman to now being the chief shepherd of Jesus' flock, whose flock will be in caring for the church – the Lord's sheep!

Jesus then told Peter "to follow Him." Peter turns and sees that there is someone following. It is the Apostle John, who never ever identifies himself in the first person, but usually as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Throughout his whole 21 chapters he always alludes to himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person – and never in the first. Here he gives a further clue to himself being the "one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "LORD, who is going to betray you?" Even at the very beginning of John's Gospel, when he and Andrew were following John the Baptist he describes them as "two disciples and one who was along with Simon Peter's brother" – St. Andrew. Even in his first Epistle 1John he refers as "we" writing to you. In 2John he finally uses the first person in stating "I am writing to you." It is not really until John's account of the Revelation of Jesus Christ that he used his name, "He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw--that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:1-2)

Peter, seeing John standing behind him and following them asks the Lord "LORD, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." As the Gospel says rumors spread among believers that "this disciple" would not die. Jesus did not say that he would not die but said "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" All of the Apostles, including Matthias, who replaced Judas died as martyrs, except for John. That doesn't mean that the Romans didn't try!

It is said that Roman emperor Domitian commanded that the apostle John be boiled to death in oil, but John only continued to preach from within the pot. Another time, John was forced to drink poison, but, as Jesus promised in Mark 16:18 "and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all." Amazingly it did not hurt him. And so John, who was the head of the church in Ephesus at the time, was banished to the Island of Patmos in 97 A.D.

John survived all of this because God was not finished with him yet. A "revelation" still had to come. While he was in a cave on the island of Patmos, John received a vision. This vision became for us "The book of Revelation"—the book that would act as the driving force for evangelism in the church age. It prophesied the events that surround the return of Christ. John wrote of Christ's second coming and welcomed his arrival. Even today we can read his writings to inspire us believers to anticipate the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two years after John's exile, the emperor Domitian died, and John returned to the church in Ephesus. The youngest of the disciples lived also to be the oldest, dying in peace in Ephesus at

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what is believed to be the age of eighty after over half a century of never ending and resilient service to Jesus and His church.

John not only wrote his Gospel, but also the 3 Epistles that bear his name: 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. As I mentioned he is the author of one of the most incredible and prophetic books of the Bible – filled with visions, warnings, prophesy and promises – directly from the King of Kings, the Lamb of God – dictated to John so that we may know the truth.

In John's closing of his Gospel he says this *"this is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."* If you take all of the miracles recorded in the four Gospels it still does not record everything Jesus did and said. We only read about what God intends us to know – and are a great testimony for the love of God for His people, and His compassion for those who came to Jesus seeking healing. I know I have heard people ask why aren't all of the 4 Gospels telling the same story? Read the Gospels and see Luke, Mark, and Matthew tell the accounts of some miracles and teachings, and John records other miracles and teachings, but the character of Jesus never changes – He is consistently the same loving Lord in all of the Gospels. John indicates that Jesus did and said much more than is recorded - but amazing just the same.

It makes you wonder – what is wrong with all those people who witnessed these many unrecorded miracles – and yet still did not believe? The Pharisees felt threatened, as did the Sadducees, the Levites, the Romans, and as we saw in Saul of Tarsus – many of the Jewish people of the time. As we know – there are still many to this day who need to have the veil that shrouds the truth – lifted from them. The Apostle Paul records the attitude that we believers need have in sharing the faith in Romans 1:16-17. He writes *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

Just as the Apostles learned a new mission from the risen Jesus at Tabgha –throwing their nets off the right side of the boat – now including Gentiles; to the Jew first – then the Gentiles – so are we to learn from this lesson and share our faith with others. St. Francis of Assisi is often credited with saying “Preach the Gospel always - and if necessary – use words!”