

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020**  
**John, Apostle and Evangelist**

**Collect**

Merciful Lord,  
cast your bright beams of light upon the Church:  
that, being enlightened by the teaching of your blessed apostle and evangelist Saint John,  
we may so walk in the light of your truth  
that we may at last attain to the light of everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ your incarnate Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.

**1 John 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**

After this 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.

## Sermon by John Richardson

Today we celebrate the feast of St John the Apostle and Evangelist.

We do not know very much about John.

All we can say with some certainty is that we have no idea who wrote the Gospel that bears John's name.

What we do have is a work of such profound significance that it has no equal.

It is for many people their favourite Gospel.

It tells the story of Jesus in quite a different way from the one we find in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

What the author of John does is to invite us into a world which is quite different from the one we find in the other Gospels.

For John the story he tells and the meaning he gives to it are one and the same thing. It is not so much the events themselves that are important: what is important for John and for his readers is what those events tell about God: about our relationship with him and with one another.

We are invited into a new world shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus.

I wonder what would have happened to the story of Jesus if social media had been around at the time?

Certainly we would know much more than we do. Many of the questions to which we need answers might be given - even though some of the answers might not be true.

All we have in the Gospels is a very sketchy outline of a story which if written today would fill many volumes.

The very last words on John's Gospel are these: "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."

A Jewish rabbi, who was a contemporary of John, said much the same thing in a different context; : "If all heaven were a parchment, and the tress produced pens, and all the waters were ink, they would not suffice to inscribe the wisdom I have received from my teachers."

Those who use social media would have a field day.

There would be so many more opinions.

There would be much that we didn't previously know.

There would be much that we now call fake news.

But perhaps it would serve only to confuse the message.

Perhaps it would focus our attention on the things that are not so important.

Our understanding of the simple basic message of the Gospel might be distorted or confused so that we came to see it as something quite different from what it actually is.

Historically, the Gospel story has been used to justify all kinds of actions and behaviour. It has been used to justify wars, persecution, discrimination, separatism and superiority.

Even today the Gospel is used to justify all kinds of moral attitudes.

It can create division and prejudice leading to conflict and attitudes quite contrary to the message of the Gospel.

Far from being a unifying factor in our lives, it can so easily become a divisive factor as it has so often done in the past.

This is because the Gospel is open to our interpretation and leaves so many questions unanswered.

How many times have we said to ourselves: "If only we knew a bit more?"

“Why did Jesus say that? “What did he really mean?”

So often, we cannot find clear answers to our questions. So often the Gospel gives us so much, but often not quite enough to be certain about what it is saying.

And yet there is an essence to the Gospel.

There is a unifying factor.

That unifying factor has to do with the words John wrote at the beginning of his Gospel and which are so familiar to us - especially at Christmas time:

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”

We need to read those words alongside some other words we find in the second letter to the Corinthians: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.”

This is not fake news. Nor is it news which should cause division and uncertainty. Unlike so much news we hear today, this is Good News. That is what the Gospel is.

It is Good News because it brings us hope in uncertain times.

It is Good News because it tells us that in spite of ourselves and our tendency to make our lives more difficult than they might be, we have been shown a way by which our lives can be transformed.

We have been shown that it is possible to reconcile ourselves to a life so full of contradictions; at one time full of joy and hope; at others full of pain and sorrow.

It is possible because that reconciliation has been achieved already.

We call it the Good News of the Gospel.

We may marvel at John’s genius in recording the Gospel story and the sheer poetry and language of the evangelist.

But the Gospel is not there to be admired and appreciated for its language and its poetry.

It is there to tell us that our lives are transformed and renewed and redirected by the life of the person at the centre of the story.

The Gospel may have been used to justify all kinds of actions and behaviour and may have created all kinds of division and dissension.

But its essence is unity.

The Gospel identifies what is at the heart of our existence; what is at the root of all that we are. It identifies the good and the bad - what life ruled by the bad can do and what life ruled by the good can do. It tells us what happens when we allow one to determine the course of our lives rather than the other.

Which means that the Gospel is to lived.

We do not know who John was.

All we know is that whoever he was he had the wonderful gift of conveying to us in words the incredible story of Jesus Christ.

We may not have the words to convey the wonder of the Gospel to others in the same way as John did.

But we are not meant to.

We are meant to convey the message to others in the way we live our lives.

The Gospel is given to us so that we might live it.

Amen.