



Parish of Finchampstead and California

SERMON NOTES

Sunday 6 September 2020

St Mary & St John Patronal Festival

Outline

- **A little local history:** Church of St John formed in 1960s and met in a hall on Nine Mile Ride just west of California crossroads. Became a *conventional district* within the Parish of St James with a Church Army Officer as minister. In 1980 became a separate parish including small areas of land from the parishes of Barkham, St Paul Wokingham and St Sebastian. Renamed St Mary and St John and met in Gorse Ride Junior School hall. Parish Centre built in Billing Avenue 2000. Combined with St James as a single parish in 2011.
- **Today's focus is on St John** - what do the books of the New Testament tell us and what are the other traditions about him?
 - NT Books written by John
 - John in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke
 - The beloved disciple in John's Gospel
 - John in Acts (and Galatians)
 - Other traditions including Revelation

New Testament books attributed to John

Traditionally St John the apostle wrote the Gospel and the three letters that bear his name as well as Revelation. Current scholarly opinion agrees that the Gospel and the letters were written by the same person, but is very doubtful that the same *John* also wrote Revelation. Opinion is divided over whether the writer of the Gospel and the letters was John the apostle, another *John*, or someone else. In my opinion this is, literally, an academic debate and has no significant effect on the authority or content of any of the books.

John in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke

- In these Gospels John is always mentioned in conjunction with his brother James. The two of them along with Peter are regarded as Jesus' intimates within the Twelve, based primarily on Jesus insisting on their presence alone with him at important events - Jairus' daughter (3), Transfiguration (4), Gethsemane (8). But Mark in particular notes the much wider involvement of James and John, as the table below shows.
- Matthew and Luke both seem to be less interested in the prominence of James and John. On the other hand Matthew, by introducing their mother as the initiator of their request for special treatment (5), seems to want to deflect some of the criticism of them. Luke ignores this incident altogether, possibly for the same reason.
- It's not clear why Jesus nicknamed the brothers *Sons of Thunder*. Mark alone reports this and nothing in his Gospel suggests this is appropriate - in fact

Luke's unique account of their suggestion of destroying a Samaritan village (6) comes closest.

Incident	Mark	Matthew	Luke
1 Called by Jesus to be his disciples: Leaving their boats # Witnesses of the miraculous fish catch # Listed as members of 'The Twelve' Described by Jesus as 'Sons of Thunder'	1:19-20 3:13-19 3:17	4:21-22 10:1-4	 5:4-11 6:12-15
2 Witnesses of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law #	1:29-31	*[8:14-15]	*[4:38-39]
3 Witnesses of the raising of Jairus' daughter >	5:37-43	*[9:23-26]	8:51-56
4 Witnesses of the Transfiguration >	9:2-10	17:1-7	9:28-36
5 Request to sit at Jesus' right and left hands 'in his glory' ø Indignation of the other disciples	10:35-40 10:41-45	20:20-23 20:24-28	
6 Suggest the destruction of a Samaritan village			9:51-56
7 Question Jesus about the destruction of the Temple #	13:3ff	*[24:1ff]	*[21:5ff]
8 Present in Gethsemane >	14:32-42	26:36-46	*[22:39-46]

With Peter and Andrew

> With Peter

* These incidents are reported by Matthew and/or Luke but James and John are not specifically identified

ø In Matthew, the brothers' mother makes the request on their behalf

The beloved disciple in John's Gospel

John is not referred to by name at all though he and James are described as 'the sons of Zebedee' in 21:2. Tradition has it that John is the beloved disciple who is mentioned several times as shown in the table below.

Incident	John
9 At the Last Supper Jesus predicts his betrayal +	13:21-26
10 Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another +	19:25-27
11 Peter and John told of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene They run to the tomb John 'sees and believes' ^	20:1-2 20:3-7 20:8
12 At the Sea of Galilee - the miraculous catch of fish Including John's recognition of the stranger as Jesus ^	21:1-14 (21:7)
13 At the Sea of Galilee - Jesus' conversation with Peter about John and his death (correcting a false rumour that John would not die)	21:20-23
14 Identification of the beloved disciple with the author of the Gospel	21:24

+ In these passages John's closeness to Jesus is emphasised

^ John's discernment appears quicker and deeper than Peter's (see the contrast between the two as described by Aelred of Rievaulx in the final section below)

John in Acts and Galatians

In the early part of Acts, John is reported several times in the company of Peter who invariably takes the lead (see table below).

St Paul clearly saw John as one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church at the somewhat fraught 'Jerusalem conference' when the Christian attitude to Gentile conversion was argued out.

Incident	Acts
15 With other disciples in Jerusalem after the Ascension of Jesus	1:12-14
16 With Peter healing the crippled beggar at the Gate Beautiful	3:1-26
17 With Peter before the Sanhedrin	4:1-23
18 With Peter sent on an investigatory trip to Samaria	8:14-25
	Galatians
19 With other leaders of the Jerusalem church when Paul and Barnabas sought approval for their Gentile mission (Acts 15:1-21 refers also)	2:1-10

Other traditions including Revelation

The final element of the traditions relating to John locates him first in Ephesus, with Mary the mother of Jesus, and then exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation, before a final return to Ephesus. There is no supporting evidence for any aspect of this tradition other than the naming of 'John' within the text of Revelation (1:1,4,9; 22:8). Scepticism about shared authorship of the Gospel and letters on the one hand and Revelation on the other arises from their very different emphases, styles and theological approaches.

Many other traditions about St John developed over the centuries, but none of these have any grounding in known facts about him. In art he is often represented either as a young man (the beloved disciple) or an old one (reflecting his long life). Most common attributes are a book (his Gospel) or an eagle (one of the four living creatures in Revelation subsequently applied to the Evangelists). He is sometimes portrayed with a chalice containing a serpent: in the apocryphal *Acts of John* a story is told of his faith allowing him to drink poisoned wine without harm.

More instructive is what the Bible tells us about the contrasting characteristics of John and Peter, as interpreted for example by Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-67): *... to Peter Christ gave the keys of his kingdom; to John he revealed the secrets of his heart. Peter, therefore, was the more exalted, John the more secure ... Peter was exposed to action, John was reserved for love.*