

A Message Worth Hearing
Feast of St. John the Evangelist, Year B
Revelation 1: 1 – 6; 1 John 1: 1:1 – 2:2; John 21: 20 – 25
December 27, 2020

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

It is hard to get away from being bombarded by some sort of message. Everywhere we turn, there is a message. Email messages. Voice messages. Instant messages. Commercial messages. Radio messages. Secret messages...(well, maybe if you are some sort of spy).

It seems everyone has something to say these days. But, I bet you have never had a message like St. John.

St. John had been the youngest of Jesus' disciples. Raised in the town of Bethsaida, he was fisherman, along with his brother James and his father Zebedee. Zebedee must have a big personality, because Jesus had given James and John an odd nickname, "The Sons of Thunder."

Yet, being from the same town, they were probably good friends, and fishing competitors, with Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew.

While Andrew was Jesus first disciple, it was the other three, Peter, James, and John, who would be part of Jesus' elite 'inner circle'. These three were the only ones present when Jesus healed Jairus' daughter. They were also the only ones invited up the Mount of Transfiguration and were present with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on that fateful Maundy Thursday, where Jesus was betrayed by Judas.

John was present, along with Jesus' mother, Mary, when Jesus was crucified. Jesus made John the caregiver of His mother. It is believed that Mary then lived with John until her death.

St. John is also the only one of the Apostles who was not martyred for the faith. Jesus even alludes to this in our reading today. It is after the resurrection and Jesus had just told St. Peter how he would die. Jesus and Peter then, apparently, move away from the other disciples and Peter notices that John is following them.

So, Peter asks about John's death. Jesus tells Peter, "*If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?*" Pretty much telling Peter, don't get caught up in all of that.

I have little doubt that Peter was probably thinking the same thing that you and I would have thought. Jesus just tells you that you are going to die as a martyr... you would probably want to know if anyone else was going to share that fate and who was going to get off easy.

Jesus steers Peter away from any such thinking and reiterates what He had just told him, "*You follow me!*" A good lesson for all of us, I think. We can certainly compare our lives to others. Especially this year! Others have had it easier, harder, better, worse. We can find our worth in how things have played out for us, or we can simply hear Jesus' words of, "*You follow Me!*"

St. Peter certainly did follow Jesus. As did all the rest of the Apostles. Each of them suffering for the faith.

John was also persecuted, even being exiled to an island. But, it is said that he eventually took residence in Ephesus, where he became bishop, preached into his 90's and died around 100AD.

Being the last living Apostle, if anyone in the early church had a message to be heard, it would definitely have been St. John. His full title, as he is now known, is St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. But, as we have already heard, he could have had many other titles; bishop, elder, caretaker of the Mother of God...

But, he is primarily known as St. John the Evangelist. Why? Because he, too, had a message.

In his Gospel, he tells of our Lord Jesus, recording many of Jesus' sayings; including the Good Shepherd discourse and the infamous 'Gospel in a nutshell,' John 3:16. I should probably

mention that John does quite a fantastic job of summarizing Christmas in one single, solitary verse: *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14). After all, when it comes to Christmas, we are not celebrating the birth of a baby, but God incarnate...the eternal God in human flesh!

St. John ends his Gospel with these thought provoking words, *“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them were to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”* St. John apparently thought very highly of Jesus. And, he is right. While John is speaking of Jesus as a man, and that the earth would not be able to hold the volumes of what He had done, imagine trying to write a book about all Jesus has done as God!! We have 66 books in our Bibles. And, even that any books do not do justice to the wonders and majesty of our God and our Savior.

Yet, out of those 66 books, St. John writes five of them. Wouldn't it have been something to have been able to have been one of those fortunate souls in Ephesus that got to hear him preach regularly? Sunday after Sunday, hearing the firsthand accounts of our Savior's earthly life. I wonder what stories John told them, that we will never hear in this life...

Yet, we do get a glimpse into that world. Our Epistle reading this morning was probably written by John while he was in Ephesus. He is writing to the churches in that area. He is the bishop after all.

He makes sure to let them know who is writing, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you*

too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1-4).

John goes through all of this so that those who hear what he has to say will have confidence that he knows what he is talking about. He was there. He saw Jesus. He heard Jesus. He touched Jesus. He was a witness to all that Jesus did, taught, and said.

Therefore, his message is one that is of great importance. But, he doesn't give it just for information. He wants those who hear this letter read, just as you did this morning, to *“have fellowship with us.”* Not fellowship as in sitting down to a potluck, but fellowship in something much larger... actually, not a something, but a someone: Jesus, the eternal word of God! John is inviting us to believe with him in Jesus, the God Man.

John then goes on with some verses very familiar to us as Lutheran Christians, as we say them often in our Confession of our sins at the beginning of the service.

But, then he reiterates why he is writing, *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, 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” (2:1-2).*

My friends, we are bombarded with so many messages. So many things that demand our attention. So much information and false information. So many things to sort through and filter out. So many things want to instill in us fear, lust, greed, pride and selfishness. So many things that want us to take our eyes off of the things that really matter.

Thank God for St. John, who stayed consistent in his message. A man who stood as an example of one who never deserted his Savior, who held on to Him in the times of adversity, who proclaimed boldly the Good News of Great Joy, who gave us such wonderful writings, so

that we, too, may have boldness, confidence. Because of him, and many others like him, we continue to share that Good News, the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ; Son of God and Son of Man. Emmanuel...God with us.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.