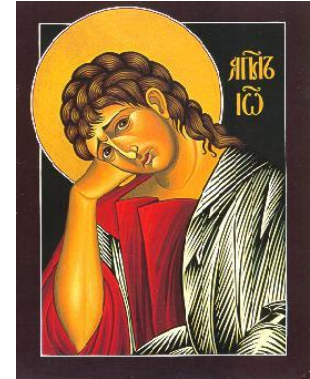


St John

Not long before it was time for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. He sent some messengers on ahead to a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But he was on his way to Jerusalem, so the people there refused to welcome him. When the disciples James and John saw what was happening, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy these people?" But Jesus turned and corrected them for what they had said. Then they all went on to another village.



Luke 9: 51-56

Background

John was a son of Zebedee, a fishing boat owner on the Sea of Galilee. John and his older brother, James, were called to follow Jesus to become fishers of men. They obeyed and followed.

In the beginning, John was quite an aggressive person. He and James received the nicknames "sons of thunder" for their quixotic temper. There was the incident when a Samaritan town refused passage for Jesus and his followers. James and John were prepared to blast the village out of existence. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, quieted things down and they proceeded on their journey with no violence to the village.

One day, James and John inappropriately asked if they could have a special place of honor when Jesus came into his kingdom. The other disciples were upset with this attempt to gain power and favoritism. Jesus in turn taught that those who would be first in God's kingdom must first be humble servants of all (Mark 10:35; Matthew 20:20).

John eventually experienced a transformation while following Jesus. This angry and ambitious man became a devoted disciple. Such is the power of Christ to change lives. John was the only disciple who followed Jesus to Golgotha. From the cross, Jesus asked John to care for Mary, his mother. Jesus must have had great love for them both. John came to be known as "the beloved disciple."

Reflections

The Guinness Book of World Records lists the shortest sermon ever preached. John Albrecht, an Episcopal priest in Michigan, gave it. He stood in his pulpit to preach, paused, and said "Love!" He then sat down. Some said it was the best sermon ever preached.

One can imagine John as a beloved leader of the early church teaching a congregation about Jesus. They could see the transformation for themselves. Jerome (early church Biblical scholar) tells the story of John's last words. When John was dying, his disciples asked him if he had any last message for them. "Little children," he said, "you should love one another." He repeated it again and again, and they asked him if there was anything else. "Love is enough," John said, "for it is the Lord's greatest command."

John had discovered what matters most in life. Life is all about God's love. God wants the fellowship of believers to be known for love. Jesus said our love for each other is our greatest witness to the world. "My children, I will be with you for a little while longer. Then you will look for me, but you won't find me. I tell you just as I told the people, You cannot go where I am going. But I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, just as I have loved you. If you love each other, everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13: 33-35).

Early tradition indicates that John moved to Ephesus and became the bishop of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Tradition also indicates he was banished to the prison island of Patmos for many years. Many claim Mary, mother of Jesus, accompanied him and she became a valued partner in ministry. It would be great to have a time machine to go back and personally observe these many details.

The presence of John and Mary in Ephesus would have been a great irony. Ephesus was known as "the gateway to Asia." It was a major crossroads for those traveling to Rome. The word "Ephesus" means "appetite." Many worldly hungers were satisfied there.

Ephesus was also the site of the temple of Artemis, the goddess of fertility and love. The temple was considered one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. Within the temple were young women forced into sexual slavery.

The pagan leaders believed acts of physical acts called “love” guaranteed good harvests and prosperity. This was not love; it was ungodly violence.

John and Mary stood for a different type of love, a sacrificial love, God’s love. Saint Paul describes this type of love: “Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn’t selfish or quick tempered. It doesn’t keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting. Love never fails!” (I Corinthians 13: 4-8).

John and Mary must have had great success. Tradition indicates that the priests of Artemis were so upset that they poisoned John. He survived to lead others to Christ and proclaim a message of God’s true love. John the beloved disciple was also known as the beloved bishop of Asia Minor.

Strength Finders talent: Strategic

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252350/strategic-theme.aspx>

John had the special spiritual gift of “strategic” which is demonstrated in his life and writings. Strategic helps us cut through the noise and obstacles and discover a better way forward. John must have been a very effective leader in the early church with his unique way of understanding and communicating the big picture. Other Gospels contain many additional details of about miracles. They report some 50 different healing. John focuses in on only seven. Each has a powerful transformational story behind it. The Salvation Army has encouraged many people dealing with addictions to read John regularly. They have a high healing record.

John is also part of the “**strategic**” domain. These are folks who see the big picture and have gifts for understanding and analysis. This domain is most helpful when groups are looking for viable alternatives. You can dream the impossible dream but “strategic” will help you get there.

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252080/strategic-thinking-domain.aspx>

Enneagram connections: Five

John comes across as a five. These gifted thinkers are great at research and figuring out new solutions. Many of this group are not extroverts. John was often in the background but ready to set up when it really mattered. He does not speak a lot in the other Gospels but shares a powerful loving message in his writings.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-five>

Enneagram is an ancient tool used to help us better understand each other. Don't know your Enneagram type? Check out <https://www.wepss.com/> (an assessment tool approved by American Psychological Association).

*Saint John divinely counsels us
One another to love,
For every one that loves sayeth he,
Of God is truly born.
For love doth ever surely come
From God the lord above;
Such as love not, do not know God
But rather do him scorn.*

*Therefore hath Christ command us,
That he which loveth God,
By perfect love as he forbears
All that God doth abhor;
That he also his brother love,
All hate is him forbad.
All honor praise and laud to God
For this now ever more. Amen.*

The Praise of Godly Love, John Hall, 1566

Questions

1. Martin Luther called Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) “the best monk who ever lived.” Bernard fought against hatred and anti-Semitism. He based this hymn of love on the first chapter of John. How do these verses reflect John’s message? How is life new?
O Jesus, joy of loving hearts, the fount of life, the light of all:

From every bliss, that earth imparts. We turn, unfilled, to hear your call.
Your truth unchanged, has ever stood; you plead with all to call on you;
To those who seek you, you are good; to those who find you, life is new.

2. Describe “heavenly” love. When and where have you encountered it?
How have you shared it?
3. How can we be “beloved disciples” of Christ? In what manner can we follow Christ to the cross today?

