

Sermon for the Feast of St. John the Evangelist – John 21:20-25

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Jesus said to [Peter], ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!’” It was a short and snappy response from our Lord to Simon Peter regarding Peter and John. But to be fair, let’s back up and hear the whole context of the conversation ...

Peter has just learned from the Lord of the 2nd most important information about himself. He learned from the Lord about his death, the way in which Peter would glorify God: “...When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go ... Follow me.” Church history tells us that Peter was crucified upside-down in the late 60’s AD. This was the 2nd most important information about his life ... the first had occurred about 40 days prior to this conversation when he was told, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid Him ... He is going before you to Galilee.”

Nonetheless, it grated on Peter. The announcement of his coming death. So much so that he began to look around at the other disciples: “Lord, what about this man?” pointing to John. “Tell us about *his* death!” John the Evangelist whom we commemorate this 3rd day of Christmas, writer of the Gospel bearing his name, 3 New Testament letters, and the Book of Revelation, also the one to whom Christ entrusted the care of His mother after His death, was the one to which Peter was pointing. History tells us that John did live out his days, the only one of the 12 apostles not dying a martyr’s death, though he was exiled to the island of Patmos in a sort of grey persecution. Could it be that Peter envied John’s situation?

Don’t we also envy the circumstances of others? How many times are we are not content with the lot our Lord has given to us? How often do we wish to cast away our crosses in hopes that we could have another’s life? When the children of Israel were in Egypt, they wanted out. When they got out, they wanted back in. This world deals in folly and we’ve taken the bait: everyone sees only his own hardships, and the good fortune others have. We’re discontent with our own portion and resent others when God grants them more gifts and grace, despising our own portion of grace. We think others have it easier, their family, their job, etc. We grow apathetic about our station to which God has called us. Is it any wonder why we’re unhappy with our own life!?! Are we surprised to be disenfranchised from God?

But the love of God toward us was manifested, was shown, in God sending His only begotten Son into the world. The Virgin was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. She gave birth to a Son. He is God and man, God with us and for us, as one of us. He is the One by Whom all things were made. He became flesh in Mary’s womb. He became our

brother and dwelt among us to purify, cleanse, reclaim, and love us. He is Life, Love, and Light.

He has loved us by laying down His life, by being overcome by darkness, by being a guilt-offering for our sin. And we – who have been baptized into Him, who by grace confess not just our sin but also Him, who have been cleansed by His blood – we are alive. In Him we are beloved of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. In Him we have fellowship. We live in the light, by and for and in that most Holy Trinity.

That's St. John's message which we celebrate today. It's the message of Christmas and Easter as well. It's the message of the Early Church and the Medieval Church and of the Reformation. It's the message of all the apostles, prophets, and martyrs. It's proclaimed to us that we also would have this fellowship, this Holy Communion with the Father and the Son and the Spirit. In this holy fellowship we are also united to John, to Peter and Paul, and to one another. Communion means "at one with." We are one with Christ and, in Him, are at one with one another and all the saints.

This is impossible love, this holy reconciliation and fellowship. It changes everything. It turns brawny, unruly fishermen into preachers and missionaries, martyrs, and prophets. It removes not just the eternal consequence of sin, but sin itself. It turns sinners into saints. It even gives us good works to perform for the benefit of our neighbors. It makes us God's voice and God's hands on earth. God became man to be our brother. The Father rejected the Son on the cross in order to adopt us into His household. The Holy Spirit has made our hearts His temple and our mouths His witness. And if that weren't enough, He bids us come, bask in His grace, hear His life-giving, life-changing words. Feast upon the bread of life that bestows and sustains life: His risen body. Be joined again to Him. He places Himself, body and blood, God and man, into our frail bodies for our eternal good that we would be like Him.

And so He says to Peter, John, and even to us, a simple message: "You follow me!" These words were addressed not only to Peter but to all Christians. How should we follow Christ? In our vocations with respect to life and death. In life, being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, peaceable, pure in heart, tirelessly serving, helping, and comforting others. In death, patiently bearing the He cross lays on us, and praying for our enemies. Attend to your callings. Look to your own station in life and carry out your duty faithfully. You'll have so much to do that you'll forget about what others have.

Bear your cross with patience. If you're in a season where your cross is light, help bear another's burdens. Yet all the while, look only to Him who bore the cross for you, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠