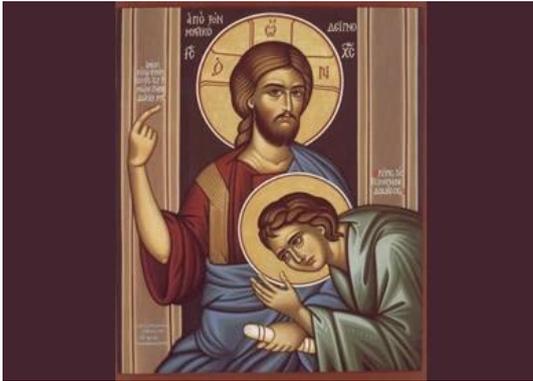


The apostle John



The Gospel According to John contains some of the loveliest and most powerful imagery of the New Testament. The author, traditionally identified as the apostle John, is also described as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (see John 21:20-24). This gives us a major clue to the nature of his writing. It speaks about intimacy – intimacy between Jesus and God, Jesus and the disciples, God and us.

At the very beginning of the gospel, John speaks of the deep connectedness between God and Jesus, as he is identified as the living and creating Word. There are a series of “I am” statements sprinkled throughout the narrative, statements that are claims to Jesus’ divinity, stressing the interconnectedness of God, the Christ and the Spirit.

Throughout, John goes to great lengths to help us see the closeness of Jesus with his followers. There are long narratives like the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) that help us understand Jesus’ capacity to reach out and touch the lives of those around him. He stresses the unity of the followers and the absolute necessity of love – love for God and love for one another (John 17).

John is concerned to develop this theme of intimacy with Christ and God with his understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is described as advocate and companion (John 14:25-27), and dwells in the believer, guiding and teaching the truth about God and life. In the upper room, the resurrected Jesus comes to the believers and breathes into them the Holy Spirit, filling them with peace and faith (John 20:19-23).

For those of us who search for God, longing to know that same kind of relationship that Jesus knew, John’s understanding of the life of Jesus touches us deeply, bringing alive our spirit, challenging our mind, inspiring us with beautiful words and poetic images, instilling in us the knowledge that we can be free to live life abundantly.

In this study we will reflect on a number of passages that help us think about intimacy in our lives – intimacy with God, with others, and perhaps even our own sense of ease as intimate beings.

John 1:1-18 – Intimacy with Jesus

Read the text carefully, and note any words, phrases or ideas that highlight the relationship between God and Jesus, and Jesus and the disciples, as one of deep intimacy.

- What does the passage say about the connectedness of all of life?
- What does the passage reveal about the purpose of God?
- Where in the passage do you find something that is stirring or enriching for your own view of life?

John 14:5-14 – Intimacy with the truth

As the gospel of John unfolds, it is clear that many do not accept the claims of Jesus. In John 6:60-70, we read how many disciples left him because of the difficulty of his teaching. Simon Peter, speaking for the others, pledges their loyalty, as Jesus - for them - has “the words of eternal life.”

- In what ways do you see the life of Jesus showing the fullness of this intimate relationship between Jesus and God?

- Can you believe that, in a single person, the fullness of God could reside? What difference does such a belief make to the way you live each day?

John 19:25-27 – Intimacy with others

Tucked away in just a few verses of the passion narrative is a beautiful and touching story. It is interesting for many reasons. We may be a little surprised to find the disciple whom Jesus loved standing there. From the other accounts, one has the sense that most of the men who followed Jesus had either deserted him, or were standing off at a safe distance. Yet here, in this account, there is one close at hand, standing with the women who are near the cross.

It is impressive that, at this devastating point in his life, Jesus turns his attention to the needs of John and his mother. It is a two-way blessing. He cares about his mother, and he entrusts her care to one he loves.

- How, do you imagine, John felt at that moment? Have you ever had a similar experience of trust?
- What, do you imagine, it meant for Jesus? Can you think of parallels from your own experience?
- Do you think that such personal inter-relationships are characteristic of the Christian community today? Where have you seen such examples of familial care?

John 20:19-23 – Intimacy with the Spirit

In many ways the culmination of the Jesus story, at least for John, is the gift of the Spirit. He recounts, at some length, Jesus' promise of the Spirit and the impact that will ensue. (John 14-16)

Read the above passage and imagine that you are there, in the room – one of the disciples. Close your eyes and, in your mind, act out the encounter. See him. Hear him. Feel his breath and the presence of the Spirit entering your being.

- How do you respond to Jesus' words?



Reflect quietly on the poem.

How well has the writer captured the experience of John for you.

How do these words match your own experience of God?

Gaze

**I never quite accommodated
that steadfast gaze
which fixed me in my place,
and penetrated mind and soul.**

**You pierce me through,
sending my head and reason
spinning,
moving heart and soul in singing,
till I am lost in you
and found in God –
flesh and spirit wrapped
in love's embrace.**

You are my flesh.

You are my spirit.

You are my life.

**You are my soul,
and I am left unearthed
and heaven bound,**

**swept up in
God's one essential being.**

Ian Price