

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN THE APOSTLE”

Matthew 6:25-34

March 26, 2017

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

When we look at the “big gun” disciples and followers of Jesus, folks such as Peter and Mary Magdalene, the lesser-known guys like James and John are easily ignored. They remain harmlessly stashed within the lines of scriptural text here and there as though they are window dressing and not major players in the story of Jesus. I beg to differ!

We have described Peter as, “The Enthusiast,” because everywhere we find him, we find high energy, an inquisitive mind, and an eager disciple. We have described James as, “The Silent Witness,” because he is given but few lines to speak in the Gospel tales, yet he seems to always be present in the high-drama

moments of the story. And as we have uncovered the real Mary Magdalene, not the one moshed up from misinterpretation and misreading, but the one who holds her head up high for God, we might call her, “The Loyalist.” She never abandons Jesus; with him to the bitter end and back again at his glorious resurrection, she deserves a better standing in Bible lore.

Today we encounter another of the disciples, one who does more *after* the death and resurrection of Jesus than perhaps before it to build up the Christian Way. John the Apostle is a fisherman-turned-evangelist, brother to James, son of Zebedee. We think he was the younger brother, for James is always listed first when the two are mentioned together. He is a simple man called to extraordinary service in God’s name, and he heeds the call with every fiber of his being.

Like James, John is a witness both during *and* after the ministry of Jesus, one of the disciples-turned-apostle with a powerful story to tell. Absent the courage and conviction of the early apostles and martyrs of Christianity, we might not be worshipping as we are today. We might not know Jesus *at all*. Hear now in part, the testimony of John, “The Son of Thunder”:

Peter and I, emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit, set about speaking to the people of Jerusalem soon after we knew that Jesus had been raised from

the dead. Peter had become an amazing preacher; I was not so eloquent, but I was learning from him, willing to risk my freedom, my wealth, and my very life to bring people to the Way of Jesus.

The Way of Jesus... It was such a strange and threatening message that we were bringing to the people, a Word that put us all in danger. After all, it was this Word that caused Jesus to be crucified. The Word is "love" and the way of Jesus is that anyone who chooses the love of Jesus will be saved. Embracing the way of Jesus saves us from our separation from God and saves from an aimless and selfish life. Being in communion with Christ and being baptized into that communion rejoins us to God in an intimate bond, saved from a feeling that life is hopeless and pointless. We know now because of Christ resurrected, that upon our death we will again be joined with our loving Creator and with all the saints that have gone from this life before us.

Jesus showed us that we need not fear our death; that we all will be reborn into eternal oneness with God.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed.

The Sadducees were not amused by our preaching. They were terrified of what we were claiming and by how the people were listening to us and joining the way of Christ by the hundreds. For every person who joined the Way of the Lord, one less person was cowed by their authority. One less Jew was under their control. One less pagan was spiritually homeless. The religious leaders thought, along with Rome, that killing Jesus would kill the Word. But the Holy Spirit carried the Word to the people, and the Word lives on. Love carries the day against Hate. Jesus lives on in the Word.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed...

We were not altogether surprised when the Sadducees had us arrested that day. Peter and I were carried away into a dark prison where we stayed the night, praying and gathering strength for the coming storm. Peter stayed calm, but I was agitated and angry.

Jesus had not nicknamed my brother and I, 'Boanerges', for nothing. Meaning "Sons of Thunder," James and I had a bit of a reputation for our tempers. We tended to come unhinged a bit when we experienced disrespect or ignorance of our Lord.

For example, this one time, we were all traveling with Jesus through Samaria on our way to Jerusalem. We ran into a bit of trouble. Standing with Jesus as he was trying to secure a night's lodging for us, we became incensed when the Samaritans refused us accommodations. You see, Jews and Samaritans don't get along. I was so mad—we were so tired!

I started telling off the lodging manager. My blood was boiling I was so insulted! James and I asked Jesus if he wanted us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them all! But Jesus told us, “no, no” in no uncertain terms. He told us to pipe down and then he quietly turned away.

Jesus was like that. He told us not to fight if we were not welcome. He told us to shake the dust off our sandals and look for an open heart elsewhere. He calmed us, and then he took us on down the road to find another place to bed down for the night. I kept walking forward while looking back behind me, just daring that Samaritan fool to come after us, to start a fight. I was more than ready. “We'll show you the Sons of Thunder!” I muttered under my breath.

Anyway, back to our ordeal before the high priest, Caiaphas, and his priests and scribes. Peter and I were taken before them the next day after our arrest and made to account for ourselves. The previous day, Peter had healed a blind beggar who was stationed outside the temple's Beautiful Gate asking for alms from the temple-goers.

Caiaphas demanded to know by what power this healing had been accomplished. We were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and Peter testified to them saying:

By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One you killed on a cross, the One God raised from the dead, by means of his name this man now stands before you healthy and whole. Jesus is the stone you masons threw out, which is now the cornerstone.

I was proud of Peter for speaking out. The high priests didn't know quite what to do. They looked at us and then they looked over at the man who had been cured. They conferred for a bit, and then they told us they were letting us go, with a warning. They had no reason to detain us this time, but we might not be so lucky the next time around.

I wanted to let that blowhard have it. I felt the anger rising in me again, but as I opened my mouth to give him a piece of my mind, I felt Peter lightly grab my

hand. I felt his concern. I felt the Spirit calming me, just as Jesus had so many times before. “Quiet, Boanerges, I heard him say. Not yet.”

They told us never again to speak the name of Jesus, nor ever again to heal anyone in his name. Peter and I stood there, considering our options in the face of this very real threat. As I was thinking about what to do or say, I thought about what Jesus might say to us next.

He taught us not to worry about the things of this earth, that we should always strive to do what was right in the sight of the Lord. I was plenty worried now. I wanted to do what was right. I wanted to fight for the Lord, but I wanted to keep living, too! What was he wanting me to do? What was the Holy Spirit ready to say through me?

I remember that Jesus taught us to look around and see for ourselves what was important in life. He would say to us:

Look as these birds of the air; they don't worry about what they will eat. They don't gather seed into barns, and yet, God feeds them. And look at the lilies out in the field. They are beautiful without doing anything to improve their appearance.

You won't add a single hour to your life's span by worrying. So spend your time on what matters, and be about the business of building God's way on earth.

When we would fret and stew he would say to us, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Well today was here. Trouble was before us. Peter and I were at a crossroads, and we were plenty scared, believe me. I wanted to fight, but I also wanted to run away. I wanted to say, “You don ’ t know what you are talking about, Caiaphas! The voice of the risen Christ can ’ t be silenced!” But then I also wanted to say, “Yes, sir, Caiaphas, sir, please let me go and I will never cross your path again.” I wanted to fight, but I also wanted to grab Peter and skedaddle out of there. Alas, the Spirit would not let me go. The Spirit would not let me stay silent. Jesus was counting on me to be the messenger of the Word.

Peter and I spoke as one. We said, “Whether it’s right in God’s eyes to listen to you rather than to God, you decide. As for us, there’s no question—we can’t keep quiet about what we’ve seen and heard.” The people went crazy! They were all praising God over what had happened. The man who had been healed by the Word was standing right there, too.

All the religious leaders could think to do was to renew their threats, but they couldn’t take any action against us that would stick. And so they let us go. We ran to our friends and we told them what the Spirit had us say. We sang and

we prayed and the earth shook and trembled as if saying, “Well done, Sons of Thunder!” We felt the Holy Spirit stand with us and in us, giving us the confidence to continue speaking God’s Word.

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed...

It worked! What Jesus told us back on the Sermon on the Mount rang true. We set our eyes to the kingdom of God and we let worry go. We quit worrying about today—we let today have its own troubles—and instead, we let the Spirit of God lead us in what to say and how to be God’s voice in the world.

I didn’t write the Gospel of John, as some say. I didn’t write Revelation or the letters of John either. Like the name, “Mary,” John was a common name in first century times and it was also a name writers adopted to protect themselves and give themselves authority. I didn’t write at all. As Luke wrote in Acts, I was an “uneducated and ordinary man,” and this is true. But I am proof that the commoner, be it a fisherman or a washer woman, can be a powerful witness for Christ. In the end, it was not my temper—my thunder—that caused my voice to be heard. Rather, it was the Holy Spirit speaking God’s truth through me. It was the Word, the power of love, that those who would not hear could not defeat.

I tell you these things because I know that your life needs the power of the Word more than ever. I remind you of what Jesus said to us because I sense your worry, even across all these generations. I commend to you the power of the Holy Spirit, because I have seen what it can do in the most hardened of hearts and in the most trying of times.

And so, my friends, in Christ remain steadfast and in your faith remain empowered by the Spirit. Do it for me, so that we did not speak in vain. Do it for you, so that your life will have meaning. Do it for God, so that you will see the power of the Word in the world.

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed...