

Sermon 27 December 2020, First Sunday of Christmas

Reverend Irene

John the Evangelist

What is an Evangelist? Someone who stands in Abington Street wearing a sandwich board and shouting quotes from the bible, especially all the bits that tell of hell and damnation?

Or is someone like Billy Graham who travelled the world filling sports stadia where people in their thousands came to listen to him speak about Jesus?

The word Evangelist is derived from a group of New Testament Greek words and it simply means, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus; which John did.

There is no doubt that John, along with Peter and James, were present with Jesus at important times in his ministry and each one had their own special gifts and talents.

They were together for the transfiguration on the mountain, and while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. John sat next to him at the last supper, and right at the end of Jesus' life, while others ran away, John stood at the foot of the cross with Mary as they watched in sorrow as Jesus died. He was there again as a witness to the resurrection when "He saw and believed".

John used his writing to help us to learn from, and engage with his gospel from his own personal perspective. In my midnight sermon I spoke about the poetry of John's prologue as we heard that "the Word was made flesh and came among us to bring peace and grace to all those who believe in him".

These are strong words, which bring the Christmas message that God, who created the heavens and the earth, came among us in the form of a baby, born in a stable in Bethlehem.

There is no doubt John was an important disciple, he loved Jesus and stayed with him to the end, he wasn't afraid to proclaim his faith and talk about his love for Jesus but was he "The Disciple that Jesus loved", the inference being that he was loved more than any of the others? Jesus chose this disciples, they were a band of brothers from scattered lives who came together under his guidance, why should one be singled out as "loved", especially as it was John himself who initiated this phrase?

Surely that would go against Jesus' preaching of model of humility and self- sacrifice.

More likely, this description of a loved disciple, represents all the disciples who have a relationship with Jesus through our faith.

We are all disciples who Jesus loves.

John, and the other disciples have an advantage over us, they knew Jesus in the flesh, they worked with him, followed him and shared their lives with him; perhaps it was easier for them to follow the Messiah they could see, we don't have that luxury. Our belief and hope are founded in Christ and the experiences we have had that we cannot explain, the times when our souls have been lifted in joy and we have felt the presence of God to reassure and give us strength in times of trouble.

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

As disciples, we are also Evangelists like John, with the responsibility to carry the Good News of Jesus Christ to others, and we do so knowing that whatever our gifts or talents, or our perceptions of ourselves, God loves every single one of us.

As the end of a very difficult year and without any certainty of the way ahead, we are to be encouraged by the events of Christmas and the birth of Jesus, that through our fellowship with God and with one another, Christ's light that came into the world will continue to shine to dispel darkness, and to bring love, hope, and healing into our lives.

Amen

John was one of the apostles who wasn't martyred for his faith, he died in Ephesus where he lived into his 90's living where it is believed he wrote his Gospel.

A very impressive age for the 1st century.