

The Community of the Beloved Disciple: 1 John 2.1-17



On the Sunday after Christmas, we celebrated the feast of St John the Evangelist. In my homily I wondered what it would like to live as part of a ‘Johannine community’. I thought it would be rather nice.

The Johannine Community refers to an [ancient Christian](#) community of uncertain existence, which placed great emphasis on the teachings of [Jesus](#), particularly as revealed through the [Gospel of John](#).

The thinking is that there must have been a time when for some Christians the Gospel of John must have been the only Gospel they had access to, and the letters of John were the only epistles they had access to.

So I was wondering what it might have been like to be part of this church.

I have found two clues in today’s passage from 1 John 2.

The first clue is that a Johannine community should be a community that holds itself apart from the world to a degree. John writes, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world.” (1 John 2: 15). There

is sometimes an other-worldly air to John's writing; a warning that Christians should not get sucked into the ways of the world too much because "the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live for ever." (1 John 2: 17)

The second clue is that a Johannine community should be a community whose members practise active peace-making. John writes, "Whoever says, 'I am in the light', while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling". (1 John 2: 9-10). In other words, to remain in the light of God you have to confront the hatred within yourself.

We all have people who make us feel angry. Initially we feel justified in our anger. We feel we have been insulted or abused in some way. When this emotion overcomes you, you have blundered into darkness. The way back to the light is to love that person.

One of my regular prayers is to be asked to be led back to the light and out of the darkness I have blundered into. I ask God to help me love a person. And having let go of that prayer I then see that actually I can love that person.

I wish I could say that I pray this prayer when I pray in church because that would make it a holy habit that I had acquired and nurtured within myself as part of being a priest. But actually, I most often pray this prayer when I am in the middle of something else and I suddenly realise that anger has led me into darkness. It's a prayer I reach for in spiritual emergencies.

So I wonder if we can live as a Johannine community? Can we live as a light in the world while also holding the world at a certain distance so that we are not overpowered by it? And can we live as active peace makers, finding our way back to the light when our anger allows us to stray into darkness?

John is confident that we can do this.

"My little children," he writes, "I am writing these things to you so you may not sin." (1 John 2:1). But the way this works is really interesting.

First of all, John says that we can live as people walking in the light because Jesus has died for our sins. He is our 'propitiation' as the Book of Common Prayer has it.

But there is more.

Because we are assured of God's forgiveness, this empowers us to obey his commandments. We get into a virtuous circle, getting better and better at obeying his commandments, better and better at walking in the light, better and better at living as Jesus himself lived.

This is the doctrine of sanctification: the idea that Christians become more and more like Jesus through the action of God's grace within them as they seek to emulate Jesus.

So a Johannine community is a community that does not conform to this world, that practises active peace-making, that believes itself forgiven of sin and empowered through this forgiveness to get better and better at emulating the life of Christ himself.

How wonderful it is when we live like that!

Yours in Christ,
Robin