

Year B Feast of St John the Evangelist (Patronal festival)
 6 May 2012
 Waiapu Cathedral
 Dean Helen Jacobi

Exodus 33:7-11
 1 John 1:1-5
 John 21:19-25

The disciple whom Jesus loved.

The unnamed disciple, who reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper;
 who stood at the foot of the cross with Mary;
 who ran to the tomb with Peter, but got there first
 and who is there at the last resurrection appearance of Jesus.

The disciple whom Jesus loved: who was he? was he one of the twelve; was he another follower; why is he only mentioned four times?

Is he the writer of the gospel, the one we know as John, the evangelist, John the gospel writer?

Or is he the one on whose testimony the gospel is based?

He is elusive: appears and disappears like a shadow yet this unnamed disciple can still be a model for our discipleship, as modern followers of Jesus, named for St John.

We read in ch 13, at the Last supper, "One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him" (13:23).

"the one whom Jesus loved", makes us think of the words Jesus heard at his baptism: "this is my son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). The grace and love of God given to Jesus, love which Jesus confers in particular on this disciple.

And so he is the one who reclines closest to Jesus at the Last Supper.

There is a closeness, an intimacy which we glimpse here.

There are so many moments in scripture which are glimpses, things mentioned in passing, which we would love to know more about.

Why was he described as being so close to Jesus ?

Was he someone from Jesus' family, or his home town ?

Why does he only appear for the first time at the Last Supper ?

But we do know that Jesus loved him.

And that one line conveys so much.

We think of Jesus' words about love – love one another as I have loved you; love your neighbour;
 love your enemies;

as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, abide in my love;

no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Jesus loved all his disciples, he loved all those who weren't his disciples, he loves each one of us, and he loves all those we don't love.

It seems such a cliché to say God loves us, Jesus loves us – it sound so obvious and so blasé.

And yet so often I think we fail to really believe or really feel that God does love us, you and me, as we are, with all our faults.

Try putting yourself in the picture at the Last Supper with the disciples reclining at the table, can you imagine yourself next to Jesus in that place of honour and privilege, reaching for the bread, the wine? Or do you want to step back to the edge of the room or out the door. Put yourself next to Jesus;

For that is where you belong, for you too are a beloved child of God.

The next time we see the beloved disciple is at the foot of the cross, "standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother 'Woman, here is your son'. Then he said to the disciple 'here is your mother'" (19:25-27).

The love of Jesus gives courage.

This disciple does not run as the others did.

This one stays with the women.

This one faces up to the agony and the suffering.

He stays with Jesus to the bitter end.

The love of Jesus confers responsibility.

The disciple has a task to do, to care for Mary, which he does by taking her into his home.

We who are loved of God also have tasks given to us: to care for our families, our communities.

Love is not just a lovely warm fuzzy feeling, love is empowering, giving us roles and tasks in our communities.

We are called to transform injustice in our world and communities.

And the love of God gives courage to face the pain and suffering in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

If we can imagine ourselves at the Last Supper do we then have the courage to stand at the foot of the cross?

To acknowledge the evil in our world and see God facing it too.

If we can, then the next time we stand alongside the beloved disciple it will be at the tomb.

Not standing but running to the tomb to see if what Mary Magdalene had said was true.

To see if the tomb is empty, to wonder what this might mean.

To be a disciple is to be a witness to the resurrection, to proclaim the risen Christ.

To proclaim it and to puzzle over it, to wonder how did this happen, what might it mean.

We have to figure that out for ourselves too but unlike the beloved disciple we have the benefit of the scriptures, and the experience of the church to help us in our understanding.

The last time we see the beloved disciple is our reading from this morning where Jesus has appeared at the sea of Tiberias, the disciples have hauled in a huge catch of fish;

Jesus has commissioned Peter to care for the community of believers.

And there is the strange interchange between Peter and Jesus where Peter asks – what about him then ? if I am to care for the community – what is he going to do?

The beloved disciple is to be the one to pass on the testimony to be recorded and handed on down the generations.

As loved disciples we too are called to proclaim the life and deeds of Christ, making sure they are known to our generation and the next.

In this our 150th year we have spent time celebrating the fact that our forbears passed the faith on to us.

They modeled the beloved disciple as we are called to as well.

Over the next month we will be preparing for the AGM of our parish; electing new leaders; and making our financial commitments for the next year.

It is always a time to take stock, to reassess, to look at where we are heading as a parish.

And in our 150th year we have that opportunity to look right back and to look further forward than one year, to look ahead for generations to come.

How are we doing at handing on the faith to the next generation; how are we doing at securing the future of the parish for the next generation.

This year with our stewardship material we will again be sending out information on bequests: we are here in this building dedicated to St John because people before us who didn't even know us entrusted us with a gift of their money to be invested for us and our children.

Do we have the courage to do the same?

Proclaiming the life and deeds of Christ is about more than money but committing some of our income and therefore letting go of its hold over us is a sign of discipleship.

There are many other things we pass on to the next generation: our worship, our prayer, our modeling of working for justice in our community; our attitudes to life and death; all these things we have inherited from the last 150 years and all these things we pass on.

The beloved disciple, a model for our discipleship: first acknowledging that we are indeed beloved of God, we are then invited to the table, to share the meal with Jesus.

We stand at the cross in times of suffering and pain in our lives, and Jesus cares for us then.

We in turn care for others in their time of need.

We are witnesses at the empty tomb, and witnesses to the resurrection.

We are part of the community charged with passing on the good news of Jesus Christ.

And like the last line of the gospel we know that it is impossible to contain even our own experience of the risen Lord.