

30 - FROM GALILEE TO THE WORLD

The Gospel comes to a conclusion with the story of a final appearance of Jesus to a few disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Most scholars agree that this is an epilogue, not originally included in John's Gospel and presumed to be from another author. But there are no early manuscripts in which it does not appear.

Many themes of the Gospel appear again in this chapter: Jesus' self-revelation, a miraculous provision of food, a command to love, and the future life of the disciples are only some of these. All underscore the truth that Jesus is still with the disciples and his presence still available to John's community – and to us.

The number or identification of the disciples has some significance. Nathanael appears only for the second time in the Gospel. His presence recalls Jesus' promise to him in 1:47-50 that he would see "greater things than these." The miracle that follows in 21: 4-8 establishes continuity between the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the beginning of the community's life after the resurrection.

The disciples recognized Jesus because of the abundant catch of fish. Like previous signs he had seen, the Beloved Disciple saw this new one as an act of the same Lord. Jesus' ability to provide for his disciples is repeatedly emphasized in vv. 9-14. The meal is the same as that in ch. 6: bread and fish, once again pointing to the abundance of Jesus' gifts. It serves the purpose of aligning the work of the disciples with Jesus' own work. The traditional

place where this occurred is named "the seven springs" and is close by the hillside where the five thousand were fed.

The next part of the story is sometimes referred to by tourist guides as "the primacy of Peter." Jesus asked Peter if he loved him and instructs Peter to "feed my sheep." He repeated the instruction three times, counterbalancing Peter's three denials of Jesus. His former denials did not prevent him from participating in the work to come.

More significance than there should be is given to the different Greek words Jesus used for "love" (*phileo/agapao*) and "sheep/lambs." Neither the varieties of love nor the object of that love is important, but Jesus' charge to love as he has loved. Peter's love for Jesus should translate into his care for Jesus' flock, i.e. the gathering community.

Vss. 18-19 introduced a new subject – Peter's martyrdom. Most scholars read the words "stretch out your arms" as a reference to Peter's own crucifixion, a tradition that appeared very early. Peter's question about the beloved disciple's future, however, does not suggest that he would not die before Jesus returns. Rather, it refers to the beloved disciples remaining with the Christian community and communicating to them the story of the Gospel. As Peter bore witness to Jesus by dying a martyr's death, the Beloved Disciple – presumably John – would bear witness by telling the story.

The Gospel ends by pointing to the ongoing presence of Jesus in the Church, then and now.