

James 1

St. John 16:23-33

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen+

Welcome to the complex and often mysterious, confusing world of words that surround the Gospel of St. John! If you listened enough to hear the whole reading and are not left scratching your head a bit, you may be the most enlightened of individuals. As a professor of the NT once said to a group of students, "Sometimes you have to live with a text until it releases its message".

Today we get an insiders glimpse of St. John's picture of Jesus. It is as if a hidden camera or microphone captures and brings us, with the disciples, into a private moment in time. It is called the Farewell Discourse in N. T. literature. Here, in the full bloom of Easter, we get a flashback; the device John uses to draw us into his message. You have seen those in TV programs and movies. Overhearing a grandchild recently, who was watching a fantasy movie with her mother, the conversation took a twist following similar twists in the program. Apparently, the scenes switched quickly from one setting to another and finally the question was framed; "It's the same person in all these (segments); is this Now or in the past?" Flashback! It gives the viewer an insight into NOW because of what happened THEN. But dynamically it does something else very potent—it alters our position from mere viewer to participant!

Have you ever had an experience, an event, a moment in your life that though long past it still echoes in your mind, soul, heart, and being, and carries real power, even now? Perhaps it is the birth of a child, a marriage or new relationship, or a tragedy, loss, or disappointment which still influences your present. This is the momentum of a flashback. St. Joh brings us from the Resurrection reflexively back in order to pull all of our life concerns, questions, and struggles into the picture. And notice the ways used to get our participation. It is through a set of tensions, back and forth between 2 points. Jesus mentions figures of speech (mysteries), and the disciples finally think he speaks clearly and boldly. He tells them to "ask in my name" (and you had better know this is not asking for goodies, but for clear understanding of who Jesus is), and then tells them they will not need to ask because the Father loves them. There is abandonment (your will leave me) and presence (yet I am not alone). There are questions of what it means to believe and Jesus challenges them with "Do you believe now?" You will soon scatter! And even though you will scatter out of fear you will peace in me. All of these are framed by the tension between what now is, and what will be "in THAT DAY"—the full reign of God the Father. And the most powerful of these is the reality that in this life we have tribulation, suffering, anxiety, laid next to the promise to "take Heart" for I have overcome the threat!! John invites us to see where it is in all this that we stand alongside the disciples. What confusions and questions (rogation Sunday—asking) haunt us when false courage gives way to honesty?

(I wrote most of this homiletical endeavor between 2 occasions; my father's diagnosis of cancer and an 8 hour trip to the emergency room Friday with a granddaughter. The words "in this world you have tribulation sound very real). Then I hear, "Be of good cheer; take heart"—Now there sits a set of opposites!!

In this world you have...Can any of us look about and not have concern about living in this world and time? North Korea and Iran behave in ways that approach unconscionable with nuclear power. We are people aging and struggle with ailments for which treatments are minimal, and many grapple with those alone. Youth must face a world where the future is unclear, and the

likelihood of a level of living equal to their parents unlikely. We find ourselves facing the needs of others who seem to want too much. And in a society riddled with social media we live in isolation where people lose themselves. In recent days we have heard people say, and perhaps we have as well, “This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How can people destroy one another, or make common uncivilized patterns of behavior? But that very question encases the fallacy of our age that human progress is merely a matter of a little more education, re-education, or more access to the world's goods. Those assumptions are dishonest. In this world you have tribulation, and being Christian does not insulate us from the pain.

There is however, the other piece of this taut strand of cloth; “But, take heart, I have overcome the world!” This spoken by one who was born into the same space we occupy; who was born and lived in relative poverty and obscurity among a people captive to a cruel political and economic power; a man who from the cross cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” from Ps. 22. This is from the One in whom God has acted in the midst of all that frightens us. Take Heart, he says, and obviously it is not simply keeping a stiff upper lip, nor is it something we can do on our own. It is either an illusion or a promise.

In translating this text something surfaced that I had not noticed so much previously. It is one little word which is a conjunction—in Greek ‘*alla*’; in English ‘*But*’. It is a magnificent countering word. It points us beyond the immediate and apparent—Not simply this, **BUT ALSO THIS**. Have you considered how often in scripture that is spoken? You have heard from of old, hate your enemies, **BUT** I say...or from Isaiah, “Heaven and Earth will pass away, **BUT**, my word (that is my divine activity For the world) will not pass away, and “though the mountains be shaken and hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken...or in John, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that all who believe in him should not perish, **BUT**, have everlasting life”. God's countering promise to the threats of loss, dissolution, and fear echo everywhere. When Jesus says in our pericope for the day, “in me you have peace”, it is predicated on the love God has for his people. Yes, you have loved me, yes, you have trusted me, and yes, you seek to keep my commandment to love one another, **BUT** is all rests on this: As I have loved you. It is in this relationship, intimate and unbreakable that we see how “the world” is overcome by peace.

There are 2 pieces of art to which I want to call your attention. The first you have undoubtedly seen. It is Da Vinci's “Last Supper”, and is familiar. The other was on the front of our bulletin a few weeks ago, and it is the “Resurrection” segment of the Isenheim Altar by Matthias Grunwald, which shows Jesus raised and the guards prone as dead men before him. There is an interesting artistic device that both painters used to create these masterpieces. If you draw the lines of perspective over these paintings they converge at one point; on Jesus. All the other figures, even though they are important to the message, are tertiary. It is as if the artists are telling us the secret of life in the midst of all other things, all other relationships, all other challenges (betray and death) is to be found in the one who promises that we can take heart for he has overcome all that can ultimately harm us. Amen+