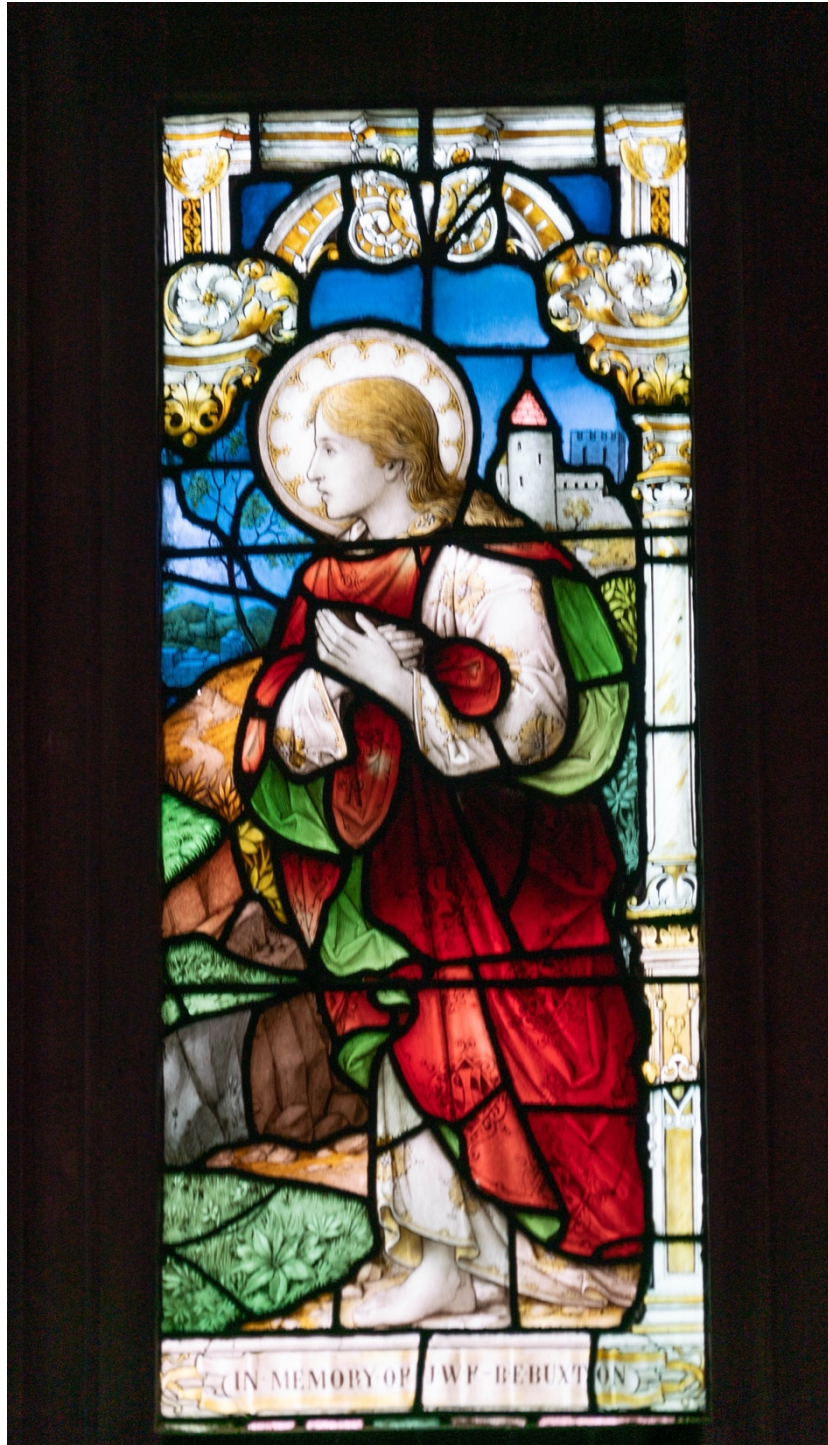


Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



St John at the Tomb

All Souls Chapel Window (South side)

Maundy Thursday



Reading: John 20: 1-10

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Commentary

John has appeared more than once in these reflections – depicted as the writer of the Book of Revelation, and also as an apostle with his iconographical symbol of the chalice. We have discussed how he has been identified as the ‘beloved disciple’ and author of John’s Gospel, and this is how he appears here: ‘the one whom Jesus loved’ who goes with Peter to the tomb. He is an eyewitness to the Resurrection.

John, and his older brother James, are also called ‘sons of Zebedee,’ and with their father they fish the Sea of Galilee. They are among the first to be called by Jesus to become ‘fishers of men.’ Jesus nicknames them ‘Boanerges,’ or ‘sons of thunder.’ (Mark 3:17) It might have something to do with their personality, fiery preachers, or always rumbling in the background. Jesus doesn’t explain. St Luke tells a story where the brothers want to call down heavenly fire on an unreceptive Samaritan town (Luke 9:51-6) until Jesus rebukes them.

John seems to be part of the inner circle of Jesus, along with his brother James, and Peter. They witness the raising of Jairus’s daughter, they are present at the Transfiguration of Christ and witness his Agony in the Garden. St Luke tells us that Jesus sent only Peter and John into the city of Jerusalem to make preparation for the Passover, the Last Supper (Luke 22:8), where the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ reclined next to Jesus, ‘lying close to the breast of Jesus’ (John 13:23-25).

The Greek word for ‘breast’ (kolpon) is the same word used in the Prologue of John’s Gospel: ‘No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom (kolpon) of the Father he has made him known.’ (1:18). Maybe the ‘beloved disciple’ here represents the Church, which is in the same intimate relation to Jesus as Jesus is to the Father, called to communicate the Father’s love as we know it in Christ.

John alone among the apostles remains with Jesus at the foot of the Cross along with certain women, the ‘myrrhbearers.’ From the Cross Jesus speaks to John and gives him custody of His mother, Mary.

On Easter morn, John runs with Peter to the Tomb after Mary Magdalene reports to them the stone had been taken away. This is how John is depicted in this window, standing behind Peter who was the first to go into the Tomb.

After Pentecost, John and Peter are prominent in guiding the early Church: He was with Peter when the lame man is healed at Solomon's Porch in the Temple (Acts 3), they were imprisoned together (Acts 4) and they go together to visit the new converts in Samaria (Acts 8). John, along with Peter and James are described as 'pillars of the church' by St Paul.

According to tradition, John took Our Lady to live with the Christian community in Ephesus, where he wrote the Book of Revelation, and lived until a great old age. He is buried there.

Meditation

On reading John's Gospel by Canon Alison Joyce, Rector of St Bride's Fleet Street.

"Imagine for a moment that you had never before experienced stained glass windows, and you have been told to go and visit a church that was famous for them. If you were to walk round the outside of the church in daylight, looking at those windows, all you would see would be dark murky glass. And if that was all you did, you would remain both baffled and disappointed, and wonder what all the fuss was about.

Because to see wonderful stained-glass windows in their full splendour, to understand their glory; to appreciate what they are really about, you

have to commit to enter the building so that you can see them from the inside. Do that, and something that from the outside looked opaque and meaningless, suddenly springs into life.

And for me, when I tried inhabiting John's gospel, and somehow simply let it wash over me, rather than trying to work out what it all meant, line by line - when I tried to *experience* it rather than *understand* it, suddenly it began to come alive for me. I had to learn to do it from the inside, rather than walk round the outside feeling that it was closed to me. And at last I understood.

We owe so much to St John for the vision and sweep of the gospel that bears his name; our understanding of the message of the New Testament - our understanding of the meaning and significance of Christ - would be woefully incomplete without it. I still do not always find it an easy gospel; but sometimes, simply to immerse myself in its extraordinary language and powerful imagery; to allow myself to get caught up in the mystery and the mysticism of it all; is enough. Because that in itself brings me, and countless others, closer to God, and closer to the Christ to whom John the Apostle and Evangelist dedicated his life.'

Read chapter 19 of John's Gospel as Alison Joyce suggests, learning to see what John is saying by experiencing it rather than trying to understand it.

Prayer

Merciful Lord,
cast your bright beams of light upon the Church:
that, being enlightened by the teaching
of your blessed apostle and evangelist Saint John,
we may so walk in the light of your truth
that we may at last attain to the light of everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ your incarnate Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen