

Dedication

These reflective essays (lessons from John the Beloved) are dedicated to all those who have a special love for the gospel of John and to some of the wonderful scripture scholars and spiritual writers who have made the person and gospel of “John the Beloved” as he is known in Celtic Spirituality, so much more accessible:

- John Gerhard S.J. whose doctoral thesis first revealed the chiasmic structure of John’s Gospel
- Peter Ellis, CSsR whose work filled out the structure of the chiasmic format
- Bruno Barnhart OSB Cam. who added insights regarding the creation stories
- Joseph Grassi who wrote about the real identity of the Beloved Disciple

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## Introduction

This book is a collection of reflective essays on the gospel of John meant to help anyone interested in this gospel gain a better understand of the person of John the Beloved and of why and how he wrote his gospel. The format follows the pattern of the gospel, that is the first chapter is the story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee which John makes the centerpiece of his gospel and the pattern of the essays follows the outline of the arch of John's gospel. All scripture quotes are taken from the New American Bible with few exceptions.

I am not a scripture scholar though I have great admiration for scripture scholars and these essays are based in large measure on their insights. The primary inspiration for this work is John the Beloved, himself. It is my hope that readers scholarly or not would come to a deeper appreciation of the person of John by reading these essays.

## A Storm on the Sea

The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.  
 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and  
 coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid.  
 But he said to them, "I AM" Jn 6:18-20

Every genuine and worthy religious movement begins with a foundational experience. For Christianity that foundational experience is the resurrection of Christ and further, within the community which experienced the Resurrection, there are two personal experiences that are foundational to its theology— Paul's experience of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and the beloved disciple's experience of Christ walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee. Paul's experience is foundational to his theology and the story is told three times over in different places. All of Paul's theology and understanding of the Christ event can be traced back to this experience. The beloved disciple's experience is told twice—once from his perspective in the gospel of John and once from Peter's perspective in Matthew's gospel.

In Paul's case we know who he was and what his mentality was at the time of the experience. This is a little harder to come by in the case of the experience of the beloved disciple but there are enough hints to enable us to create a possible profile. We are never told the name of the disciple but the gospel that unfolds his experiences is given the name of John. This is most likely not the brother of James, one of the sons of Zebedee, as their personality traits are quite different. It is possible that the disciple's name was John and that later the two John's were confused by persons who did not know either of them personally. I like to call him John the Beloved, in deference to the title of the gospel and in contrast to John the Baptist and John the son of Zebedee. It appears that at the time of Jesus' ministry he was very young probably only in his teens as the physical affection Jesus shows him is that appropriate between a male mentor/father figure and someone just emerging from childhood.

Given his knowledge of Jerusalem and how he was known to the high priest there as we learn from the passion narrative, it is likely that the disciple's home was in Jerusalem but that he had close ties of kinship/friendship with the brothers Peter and Andrew and also knew the family of Nathanael from Cana possibly traveling back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem often. He tells us the story of how he met Jesus in the first chapter of the gospel. He was with Andrew who was checking out John the Baptist. They were hanging out listening to the Baptist and watching the baptisms he was performing. Then one afternoon the Baptist introduced them to Jesus, "the Lamb of God." Jesus invited them to come with him and they spent the rest of the day in his company beginning a close relationship.

By the time of the experience on the Sea, John the Beloved, had seen many of Jesus' miracles and heard him speak a great number of times. He was not one of the twelve men who came to represent the twelve tribes of Israel in the minds of Jewish converts to Christianity. He was a very young disciple who hung out with them and was shown special affection by Jesus. John's gospel is the only one which mentions the young "lad" who was present and had brought bread and fish to the gathering on the hillside by the Sea where Jesus was speaking to the crowds. It is Andrew, who was often with John the Beloved, who calls Jesus attention to the loaves the lad brought. Perhaps, John the Beloved was that young lad. His gospel is also the one that has the poignant observation

that the reason Jesus fled the crowds to be alone was that they wanted to make him king after the miracle of the multiplication of loaves (Jn. 6:15). The older men took the young disciple with them as they set out by boat to return to Capernaum.

It was late at night and they were a few miles out on the Sea when a violent springtime storm broke. It was quite literally a life or death situation. Then in the midst of the storm, they see Jesus coming toward them walking on the water. From Matthew's gospel we know Peter's reaction: "Lord, if it is really you, command that I come to you on the water" Mt.14:28. As is typical for his kind of personality, the whole situation becomes about him and his need to assert himself into the center of the action. Perhaps that is why he begins to sink—too much weight of self. We do not learn what the experience of John the Beloved was until decades later when he sets it as the centerpiece of his gospel. And shortly thereafter what it meant was lost because neither copiers nor commentators understood the chiasmic structure of John's gospel. We can thank modern scholarship for giving it back to us!

So what was this experience for him? His was a Genesis experience, a creation experience and a Trinitarian one. The darkness, the water, the wind was like the chaos in the opening chapter of Genesis where we are told that the Spirit hovered over the water like a brooding bird. "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters" Gen. 1:1-2. On the Sea as the darkness of the abyss is threatening to engulf them, Jesus, the light of the world, the Word enfleshed upon whom the Spirit *remains*, comes walking on the water. There must have been a certain luminescence about him that enabled them to see him. For John the Beloved, it is the "new" creation, a re-structured creation. The immense power of God, the Creator, is there in the storm. God's Word is there and that Word is not just with God. The Word also is God. In Genesis God spoke the word "light" and there was light. This time in the new creation God spoke "flesh" and that Word had become flesh. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God upon whom the Spirit *remains* and is now hovering over the waters of creation bringing it to a new birth. For John the Beloved, this was something much more momentous than the Passover of Moses. In that Passover story a strong wind had temporarily blown over the Reed Sea providing a dry path for the fleeing Israelites allowing them to escape slavery. Now the "I AM" Ex. 3 :14, God's self-description to Moses (John uses this title of God from the Hebrew scriptures to express what Jesus says as he presents himself on the water), is walking on the water, hovering over it as in Genesis. The "I AM" is present, is enfleshed in Jesus, upon whom the Spirit remains. All Three persons are present.

John would have been familiar with the story of Job and how God spoke to Job out of the storm (Job 40:6). Now God is speaking to them out of the storm. What follows in Job is one of the most beautiful and powerful stories of creation in scripture and in John's mind what is happening in Christ is a new creation.

In Celtic Christianity, John the beloved is held in special esteem as one who listened to the heartbeat of God. That heartbeat is heard in nature. The book of Job is one of the masterpieces of the Wisdom literature and certainly the young John the Beloved would have had training among the Rabbis in Jerusalem not only in the law but also in the other sacred writings. The Book of Job is an expose of how to find God and listen to God in the wonders of nature. In its climax God speaks out of the storm (Job 40:6). God's presence in the storm is seen as evidence of God's creative power. It was in this storm on the sea, as the waters of the abyss threatened, that John the beloved had

his foundational experience, an experience which for him revealed the God of creation, and God's Word (in whom all things were made) in-fleshed in Jesus upon whom the Spirit, the creative energy of God, remains always. It is a Trinitarian experience of nature and it is the great foundation, the center of the Gospel of John the Beloved.

John of the Cross, the 15<sup>th</sup> century Mystical doctor of the church, tells us in the Ascent of Mt. Carmel that persons who have such profound spiritual experiences have as it were a diamond mine within themselves to which they return again and again to retrieve gems of understanding. John the Beloved after the experience on the lake had such a mine within himself and from it he draws a profound understanding of the inner life of God. By comparing his experience with the book of Genesis, he arrives at an understanding of the very inner life of God. God's Word is with God and not only with God but equal to God and locked in divine intimacy: The Word was with God (literally "face to face") wrapped in intimate exchange and in the new creation the Word takes on flesh, humanness, and with it all of creation, bringing creation into this intimacy with the divine. "He dwelt among us" literally, he pitched his tent among us, just as God in the Hebrew testament had dwelt in the Tent of the Tabernacle and then in the Jerusalem temple. Jesus dwelt among us in human flesh and draws us into the Godhead because the union of the Word and flesh is not only eternal, it transcends time.

As the experience is closing John the Beloved tells us that they wanted to take Jesus into the boat with them but suddenly realized that they were at the Capernaum shore where they were going (Jn. 6:21). Apparently the storm had driven the boat closer to the shore than they realized, but for John the Beloved there is another meaning. He had arrived at a new shore of understanding of God and of Jesus. Jesus could no longer be put back into the boat of ordinariness or even of specialness as a prophet. John has encountered the "I Am" of Moses. John has heard the God of Job speak in the storm. John has seen the very Word of the creator in-fleshed. This experience becomes the capstone for the arch of his gospel. From this point in the center of the gospel the "I AM" sayings take on prominence.

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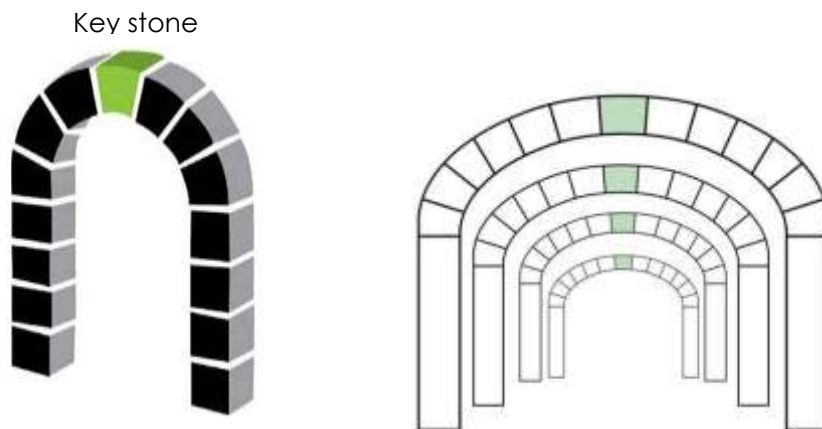


## John the Beloved's Arch

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony,  
to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him Jn 1:6  
“...the eyewitness whose testimony is true” Jn 19:35-37

“It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know  
that his testimony is true” Jn 21:24

Storytelling is an ancient and wonderful art. It has been around as long as humans have been communicating. It is how we share who we are. There are many ways of telling stories, many techniques. The manner in which a story is told has a tremendous influence on its effectiveness. You could almost say it makes or breaks the power of the narrative. In the last fifty years we have come to understand some of the storytelling techniques of the scriptures both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. This has given us wonderful new insights into the meaning of the stories. Most of the stories are told in the form of “chiasms,” –that is an arch with a central focus and building elements that match on either side. This gives the story symmetry like a beautiful piece of architecture or, to use a nature symbol, a lovely rainbow. John’s gospel is written in this format. Each mini story within the gospel is a small arch and the over-all gospel is a great expansive arch. Very simplistically put, we could use the concepts of an arch to express some of the central ideas carefully matched on either side of the arch with the story of Jesus walking on the water as the keystone.



In the first chapter we have some major concepts that are brought to completion in the closing of the gospel. More dynamically put, John the Beloved has created a kind of vortex of energy between as it were two poles of magnetism and in this movement we are caught up into the spirituality of the Gospel.

The author is keen on identity, a kind of minor theme in the first chapter, which at first may seem strange because we do not even know his identity. Scripture scholars now agree that the author of the gospel is not John the brother of James. So seemingly his identity is unknown. But maybe we do know it and just don't realize it. Clues are hidden in how John the Beloved handles identities. John first identifies the Word—the Word is God. He further identifies Jesus as the Light, the Life, the Only Son, the Son of

Man, the King of Israel. John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. John the Beloved identifies John the Baptist as the great witness whose is a “voice in the wilderness” Jn 1:23. Jesus identifies Simon, Son of Jonah, as Peter, “the rock” Jn 1:42. Jesus identifies Nathanael as “one without duplicity” Jn 1:47. The author leaves himself unnamed and unidentified in this first person account. But there are hints. In this first chapter we have the story of the Beloved’s first encounter with Jesus. He is touched by the invitation “Come and see.” The whole dialog has a flavor of the Song of Songs in which the seeker has a late afternoon encounter with the lover. John the Beloved says it was about four PM and Jesus invites them (himself and Andrew) in the words of the song to “come and see.” There is a hint here of deep affection and emotional bondedness as the Beloved retells the story of his first encounter with Jesus. If his name was John he deliberately does not mention it because he wants to have the testimony of John the Baptist stand out. In his self-effacement he is imitating the Baptist whose disciple he was when he met Jesus.

Looking just at John the Beloved’s first chapter for the chiasmic pattern of the whole gospel we can see that personal testimony is the anchor stone on both sides of that great arch. John the Beloved says that this is the reason for John’s the Baptist’s ministry—to be a witness, to bear testimony. Likewise the anchor stone on the opposite side of the arch of the gospel is the testimony of “the eyewitness whose testimony is true” Jn 19:35-37. Again: “It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” Jn 21:24. The dynamism, the common figure, between these two witnesses is the image of the “Lamb of God.” The Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God to John the Beloved who in turn will stand at the foot of the cross and witnesses the blood of the Lamb being shed in the completion of his sacrifice. So it is fair to conclude that the identity of the unnamed author/disciple of the first chapter is the same as that of the unnamed disciple at the foot of the Cross and we may identify him as John the Beloved. John the Baptist stands as witness at the beginning of the gospel. It is he who, in self-effacement introduces Andrew and John the Beloved to the Lamb of God. It is John the Beloved who in self-effacement like his mentor, does not give his own name but who stands witness beneath the cross, the sacrifice of the Lamb, at the closing of the gospel.

Another of the dynamic “poles” between the beginning of the gospel and the end is that of light and darkness. John the Beloved identifies Jesus as the light and life of humankind, of creation, in the prolog. For him Jesus is the embodiment of light—God’s first act of creation in the Genesis story. “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness” Gen 1:1-4. In the prolog of John the Beloved’s gospel this light appears and the rest of the gospel is in a certain sense, the separating of light and darkness during each of the “days” of Jesus’ ministry. Darkness will have its hour. That hour reaches its climax toward the end of the gospel in Jesus’ Passion. When Judas leaves the supper, John the Beloved notes: “It was night” Jn 13:30. But light will finally triumph. In the last chapter John the Beloved relates a scene at dawn, “... just as dawn was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore... (ISV translation) the resurrection brings the dawn of a new, eternal day Jn 21:4.

For the Jewish people the distinguishing feature which set them apart was not just belief in One God. It was the belief that this One God dwelt with them. God was present in the temple and had been present with them since the covenant on Mt. Sinai.

John the Beloved is keenly aware that there is a new presence of God in their midst—God is present in the humanity of Christ. Jesus' body is the real Temple where God is present. In the beginning of the gospel, God pitches the divine tent again --this time in the body of Christ: "...the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us" Jn 1:14 (literal translation). In the closing of the gospel, the body of Christ is dedicated just like the temple in Jerusalem had been dedicated. It happens in the discourse during the supper when Jesus consecrates his body to the Father using much of the same language used for the dedication of the temple of Solomon (Jn 17). The other gospels tell the story of Jesus changing bread and wine into his body and blood. John the Beloved has Jesus consecrating his body as the place of the presence of God among humankind, the place of the one true sacrifice. It is that Body we receive in Eucharist.

There were two trees in the Garden of Eden --the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. The Tree of Life is mentioned at the center of the garden in Genesis 2. It disappears from the scene as the Tree of the Knowledge good and evil becomes the focus of attention. After the fall, the focus again shifts to the Tree of Life in the center of the garden from of which Adam and Eve were kept by an angelic guard. In John's gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as ladder (understand tree) in chapter one and the fig tree (a symbol of the Tree of Knowledge) is mentioned only once. At the closing of the gospel, in keeping with the imagery of Genesis, there is only the Tree of Life—Jesus' resurrected body which Thomas is invited to touch—to put up his hand and take the fruit as Adam was no longer able to do.

Then there are the "twins." One each of them is in the beginning and the end of the gospel. In chapter one Nathanael is introduced and makes a proclamation of faith: Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" Jn. 1:49. At the end of the gospel, Thomas who is Nathanael's spiritual twin, will also make a profession of faith in a personal encounter with Jesus: Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jn 20:28.

Very beautifully we have the complementarity of the opening scenes and the closing scene of the gospel. Scholars have long debated the nature of what we know as the last chapter of John's gospel. Is it a late addition, an after-thought? Does it belong to the gospel? Did someone else write it? Is it an epilogue? We have to remember that John the Beloved was a Hebrew. He did not organize his thoughts in the same patterns we do. He likes to think in parallels and write in story form. If we look at the final scenes of the gospel from that perspective we can see that there is consistency. On the opening side of the arch the Baptist, a Samuel-like figure, has gathered a community like the Judges of old did. He has created not only a new religious ceremony for the personal re-embrace of Jewish heritage, but also an initiation into a religious movement which has drawn in some of the men who become Jesus' followers encouraged to do so by the Baptist. The focus then shifts from the Baptist to Jesus, beginning with his activity at the Sea of Galilee. At the end of the gospel seen on the second side of the arch, Peter is the Samuel-like figure drawing together community. John is careful to mention Nathaniel who was in the opening scenes of the gospel as well as Thomas, Nathaniel's "twin. There are two others not named most likely Andrew and John who were mentioned as "two others" and again were prominent in the scenes at the beginning. These presences indicate the connection between the opening scenes and the closing one. Likewise, as in the opening of the gospel, the scene has moved to the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus who has been the center focus of the arch is standing on the shore of the lake --a place of transition between two major elements of creation and he is transitioning between two worlds—two dimensions of existence. He is about to



transfer the role of Shepherd to Peter. Even as in the beginning the Baptist stands on the shore of the river transferring focus to Jesus. The thought pattern is perfectly logical and consistent. The Baptist, Samuel-like, creates community before Jesus. Jesus lives with and spiritually forms this community. Lastly Peter, Samuel-like, is reaffirmed three times after his threefold fall. He is called three times over as was Samuel before his ministry. Peter becomes the central figure holding the community together.

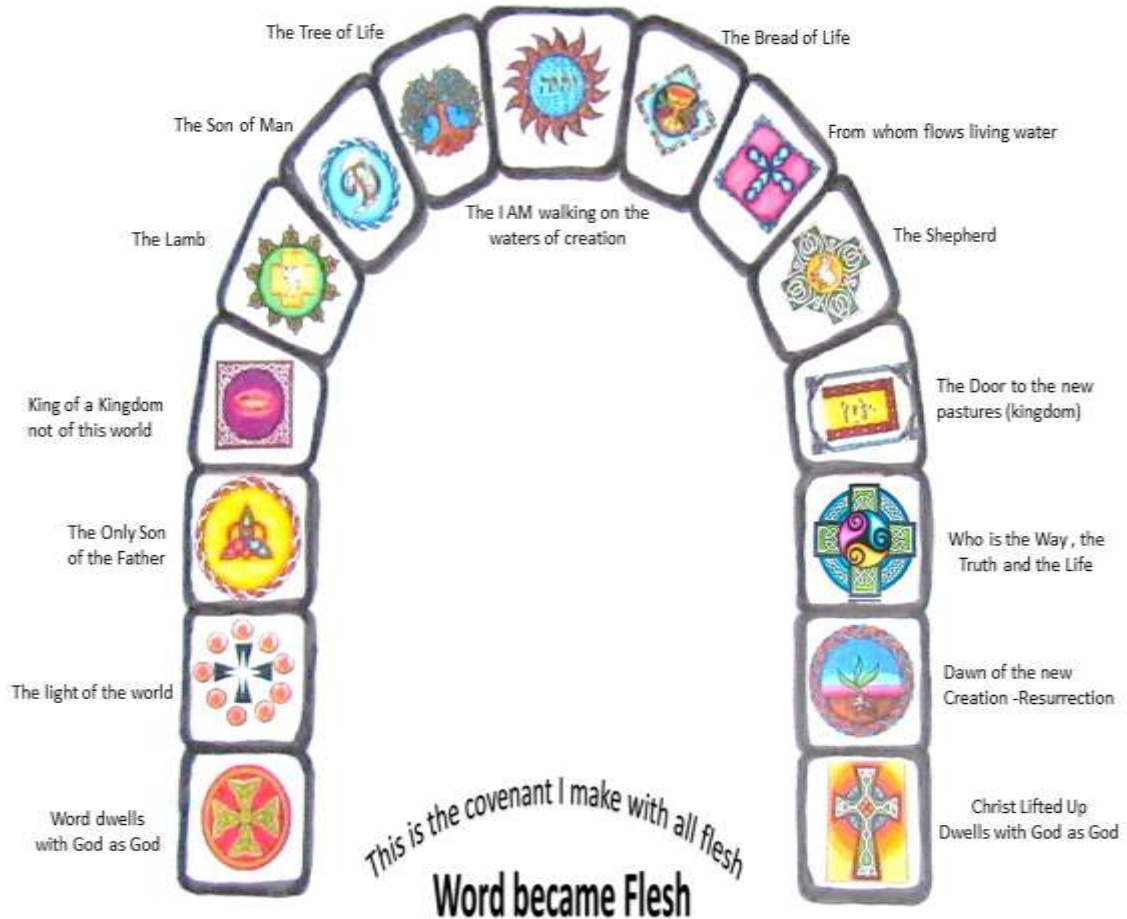
Even more significant for indicating the parallel is Peter's name. Jesus said in the opening scene of the gospel that Simon, Son of Jonah, would be called the "Rock". However, throughout Jesus' ministry Jesus does not call Simon by the name of Peter. Jesus said he would be called that but Jesus does not use the name. In the closing of the gospel, Jesus calls Simon not simply Simon but by his formal Hebrew name, Simon bar Jonah, as he had done in the opening of the gospel when indicating that his name would be changed. This is a hint that he is now being given a new role—he is becoming "Peter" as Jesus had said in the beginning. In this closing scene the solemn moment has come for Simon to become Peter. Moses was repeatedly called by name at the burning bush (Ex 3:14). Samuel was called by name the night he became a Prophet (1 Sam 3:8). Prophets are identified in Hebrew Scripture by their formal names. Moreover, this name change echoes the name changes of Abraham, Sarah and of Jacob. Abram became Abraham father of many nations (Gen 17:5), Sari became Sarah mother of nations (Gen 1:15-16), Jacob became Israel the name associated with the nation (Gen 32:28). In scripture only God changed a name and it was done to signify a new role. Simon is given the name Peter to signify he would become the leader of the community but that happens only after the Resurrection. A rock is made up of various elements fused together by tremendous forces and this rock, Peter, also has various elements of prophet, patriarch, and spiritual father fused into one by Jesus' ministry and especially his passion and resurrection.

The synoptics say Jesus gave Simon the name Peter. Matthew not being an eyewitness with those at the Jordan, has Jesus give Simon the name Peter at Caesarea after Peter's proclamation of faith. But John the Beloved wants us to know that in Jesus' keen perception of men he had already noted how others anchored themselves on Simon's leadership. Simon, son of Jonah, will be known as Peter meaning rock but Simon does not become rocklike until after his fall and reinstatement. That is the moment the name Peter becomes effective. Peter like Abraham takes on a new role and like Jacob he has had a dark night of fearful wrestling during Jesus' trial which has left him wounded with guilt. In John's eyes Peter now truly becomes the father of the new community. The arch is complete with Jesus at its center, the Baptist on one side, Simon who has become Peter, the rock, on the other. The riverside community of the Baptist has become the bark of Peter which will sail on many seas and with the Lord's help catch many fish while he himself will continue to feed them even as he has prepared the meal on this morning of the new creation. In this scene the fish they caught were symbols for persons brought into the community and the breakfast Jesus prepared is the Eucharist.

In what we have come to delineate as John, Chapter One, we have chiastic identifications of the Word, and why the Word came. We have identifications of the principle players in the drama about to unfold. These same men are the ones who as it were, form John the Beloved's circle of close friends. And we can see the wonderful chiastic pattern that will characterize the gospel. John the Beloved's Greek was not the best. He probably came to it late in life and never had the chance to bring it to the polished state of the other evangelists, but his theology is profound. The chiastic pattern he gave to his gospel is a powerful methodology for giving his gospel a dynamism beyond just ordinary storytelling. His own experience of the new creation that night on the Sea

is the key stone of the arch on the first side of which is a beginning deliberately associated with the first creation in Genesis. On the second side the dynamic points to the new creation of the Resurrection.

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## Covenant with Flesh



It has been said that we humans as “homo religiosus” not only tell the same stories over and over ad infinitum but actually dwell in those stories. We are story dwellers. Among those stories, the ones about origins, the beginnings of creation and of humankind hold pride of place. Such was certainly true of John the Beloved. He not only tells us stories about Jesus but he himself dwelt in particular stories from his Hebrew history. It is from inside those dwellings as it were that his own narratives took shape.

The stories that John the Beloved most indwelt were the creation stories. There are three of them in Genesis. Two differing versions in the first chapters and another two combined into one in the Noah myth. In addition there is another creation narrative in the book of Job. John the Beloved begins his gospel with the same words as the book of Genesis...in the beginning. This cues us in to his mindset of the creations stories.

It helps a great deal in understanding someone’s writing to know the mindset of the author. The prologue to John the Beloved’s gospel is a grand arched entrance to the garden proclaiming what John wants us to know. The keystone of this arch is that we as Christians are born of God in a unique manner. John writes his gospel “so that you may believe” (Jn 20:31) by trusting the words of an eye-witness. His is the only gospel to make that claim. It stands alone as being written by an eye witness. The others were written, names notwithstanding, by someone who knew an eye-witness not the eye-witness himself. This eyewitness, John the Beloved, chooses as does the writer of Matthew’s gospel to write in the chiasmic format which was common and popular in the Hebrew Scriptures. In this format the second half or as we would say, “the rest of the story”, compliments and furthers the first half and this “rest of the story” begins with the keystone verses, the main point of the narrative. This is the pattern in which the first creation story in Genesis is written and it is the pattern of John’s prolog.

The foundational texts of the prolog in John 1:1-18 on side one and then side two can be seen in the following chart:

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was face to face with God,  
and the Word was God.  
The Word was with God in the beginning

No one has ever seen God. The  
only Son, God, who is at the  
Father's side, has revealed God.

Moving up the arch from the bottom:

All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.

while the law was given  
through Moses, grace and truth  
came through Jesus Christ

What came to be through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race;  
the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it

From his fullness we have all  
received, grace upon grace,

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light, but came  
to testify to the light

John testified to him and cried out,  
saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The  
one who is coming after me ranks ahead  
of me because he existed before me.'"

The true light, which enlightens everyone,  
was coming into the world.

From his fullness we have all  
received, grace in place of  
grace, because while the law  
was given through Moses, grace  
and truth came through Jesus  
Christ

He was in the world  
and the world came to be through him,  
but the world did not know him.  
He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him.

And the Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling  
among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's  
only Son,

And the keystone piece that hold the two sides together is John 1:13,14

*But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those  
who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice  
nor by a man's decision but of God.*

In essence John is saying that God is infinitely generative and has further engendered believers into the very life of God through grace. The entire prolog is about birthing, generating. The Word is generated from the Father as co-eternal, co-equal (face to face). Then creation is generated (all things came into being through him). And at the climax God births humans who are willing to accept it into the very life of the Godhead.

The New Testament writers, John and Paul in particular, saw the Christ event as a new creation, a re-creation. All creation is born not simply through nature but by a special act of God when the Word becomes flesh. Humans by faith have not only existence but also grace --a further participation in the life of God. It is possible that

before he encountered Jesus, John like so many Jews of his time (and our time) did not believe in life beyond death. A person continued on through children and in the memory of society but not as a living being. Everything changed in light of the Christ event. He lives eternally with the Father and we are made participants in that divine eternal life through the incarnation. Death will be transformed by the Resurrection of the Word Incarnate from a final end to a doorway--a doorway into a much more wonderful life. For those who accept Christ, life in the next dimension holds the possibility of an intense, intimate, eternal joy, a joy that begins now by giving new meaning to our present life despite its griefs. Which is not to say that non-Christians will be deprived of eternal joy. It is rather to make the point that it is foolish of those who, given the opportunity for such joy, to then seek a thimble full of juice when there is an ocean of wine to be had.

John the Beloved bases his writing on the creation stories attempting to show the advantages of the new creation. The prolog is a commentary on the re-creation story of Noah. The Noah myth itself is a re-creation narrative. God destroys the earth through a flood returning as it were to the beginning when the waters swept over the deep. Gradually land emerges from the water as in the first creation story, then we see the presence of animal life and plant life in the verses about the dove with the olive branch. Finally God makes a covenant with "all flesh" --that is all creation not merely Noah. In the first unnamed covenant of creation God gave humans the garden and on their part they were to care for it. In the re-creation after the flood, God makes a new covenant this time with "all flesh" promising that never again because of human sin will the world be destroyed. John uses the word "flesh" in his prolog --the Word became flesh--which indicates all of material creation and harkens back to God's covenant with all flesh in the Noah myth. For John Jesus, the Word incarnated as flesh, is the fulfillment of the Noah Covenant.

The rainbow, the sign of the re-creation covenant with flesh can be considered God's chosen self-symbol--the arch representing the Father's over-arching love, the rain the Spirit falling on us and refracting the light which is Christ for us. John's gospel will go on to highlight the intimate relations between the Father and Jesus indicating that it is into that very intimacy that we are called: "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" Jn. 14:20. John's gospel and the testimonies of the Christian mystics across the centuries bear witness to this marvelous life of intimacy to which we are destined.

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## The Dwelling Place of God

And the Word became flesh  
and pitched his tent among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth Jn 1:14

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days. But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. Jn 2:19-22

And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. Jn 17:19

The phrase "He pitched his tent among us," (the literal translation for John 1:14) which John the Beloved uses in his prolog is hugely relevant of his understanding of Jesus' body. The Jews considered themselves privileged above all other faith groups because after the Covenant on Sinai the God they believed in dwelt with them. God was present in the Tent of Meeting. When finally after the wanderings in the desert and the conquering of the Holy Land, David became King and brought the Meeting Tent into Jerusalem where there was a great festival. Solomon, David's son, built a magnificent temple to house the ark in which they believed God's Presence resided. It was both an earthly presence in the Holy of Holies and the foundation so to speak of God's heavenly presence. Worship in the temple revolved around that presence. Only on special, solemn feasts was a priest chosen by lots allowed to go into the Holy of Holies where the ark was kept. All other activities and sacrifices were carried on in another courtyard once removed from the Holy of Holies, but still mindful of that presence. John the Beloved as a young boy grew up in this atmosphere. He witnessed it daily and this atmosphere made a deep impression on him.

John the Beloved, would come to realize that the body of Jesus was the true locale of God's presence taking the place of the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus' body was the physical place where God's Presence dwelt as nowhere else. This had been deeply impressed on him in the experience on the Sea of Galilee—the Word of God enfleshed in the body of Jesus was one with the creative force of the Father and the movement of the Spirit. Gradually he came to see that all worship would have as its focus this true dwelling of God—the body of Jesus.

John sets the story of the cleansing of the temple in the first chapters of his gospel to emphasize this understanding and most likely because it actually happened at the beginning of Jesus ministry as he is the only actual eye witness. The Jewish temple had become corrupt in the way worship was done. It had become in Jesus' words "a den of thieves!" Jn 2:16. In the chiasmic structure of the whole gospel, an ending counterpart to this story could be Jesus' prayer of consecration of himself and his body at the supper.

During his ministry Jesus had dwelt as it were in a tent with the disciples traveling as God had traveled in a tent with the Israelites in the desert.

Now, at this supper in Jerusalem it was time to move from the tent and consecrate the temple itself because on the next day the greatest of all sacrifices would be offered in it—the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. The Jews would try and destroy the Temple but it would be restored on the third day and the new temple, Jesus' Resurrected body, would be beyond any forces of destruction and would be the true locus of worship in spirit and truth.

In the beautiful prayer that is chapter seventeen of the gospel of John the Beloved, the new Temple is consecrated and as soon as that is done, it is time for the sacrifice to begin. The prayer is reminiscent of the prayer Solomon used to consecrate the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 8). Solomon raised his hands to pray and Jesus raises his eyes. Solomon recalls all that God has done for the people especially through his Father David. Jesus recalls all that the Father has done through him. Solomon prays for the people and Jesus prays for his own, consecrating them. Then he says that he consecrates himself for them that they may be consecrated in truth.

In the prayer Jesus prays for his own --for those who through him have come to the Father. The chiasmic center of the prayer is the words: That they may be One as we (Father and Son) are one. This is a perfect complement to the consecration stories at the last supper in the synoptic gospels because the community is never more united, more "One" than when they are all gathered around the body of the risen Jesus to receive it in the Eucharist and this is not only true of the local community but of the world wide community. It is the gathering around the body of the Risen Jesus that is the great expression of unity and this unity reflects the unity in God, "as you, father, and I are one."

It is possible that the synoptic evangelists who were using sources that are at least once and maybe twice removed from the actual event confuse an evening meal on Thursday with the Passover meal to take place on Friday. By the time they are writing there would have been tremendous pressure to have an Easter vigil reading that coincided with the Jewish feast of Passover and would parallel that liturgy. With emphasis on Jesus as the new Passover. The two events were only one day apart when they actually took place. It would be easy to conflate the two days, Thursday and Friday. Scholars have tried to solve the dilemma of the First Day of Passover being on Thursday in the synoptics and on Friday in the gospel of John the Beloved. The solution they have come up with is that there were two calendars one the Pharisees used, one the Sadducees used. However, the trouble with that explanation is the confusion it would have created in the temple itself --were there then two consecutive days of the massive slaughter of lambs? And what would happen to other Temple activities designed to follow the day of slaughter if still another day was interfering? The logistics of two consecutive days does not seem likely just from a practical point of view.

Before the synoptic gospels there is no scriptural evidence of a Passover meal being the occasion of Jesus' Supper. Paul wrote before the gospels were written and for him the meal at which Jesus gave us the Eucharist is simply the "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). The oral story could have been "On the day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread began" but what got written or copied was "On the first day of Unleavened Bread (Passover)" (Mk. 14:12) and once Mark put it that way, so did Matthew and Luke thus conflating a Thursday meal on the day before the Passover began with that Friday which was the official "Preparation Day," the first day of the Passover that year. Jesus may have sent them to prepare for the celebration of Passover on Thursday as there would have been a great deal of work involved including securing a lamb to be sacrificed the next day

and finding a place to roast it; getting unleavened bread baked etc. They would have had to be sure that there were enough of them to be able to consume the entire lamb and leave none of it. It seems that there were still items to be purchased for the feast itself given John the Beloved's comment regarding Judas: "Some thought that since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus had told him, 'Buy what we need for the feast,' or to give something to the poor" Jn13:29. And there would have been the purifications that had to be done such as physical washing and washing one's clothes. So the possibility of Jesus' disciples and friends gathering with him in Jerusalem the evening before the First Day of Passover is certainly feasible. Thus a Thursday meal together before the first day of the Passover officially began. Jesus would have pushed for that knowing that Judas was in the midst of arrangements to betray him. If they had done the purifications required before a Passover meal there would have been no reason for Jesus to wash their feet. The fact that he does so indicates that the action had tremendous symbolic value. It was a purification (something they would have recognized), before his own Passover, before the dedication of the temple of his body. This evening marks the beginning of distinctively Christian liturgy. That Thursday evening meal is what became the "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11:20). It was the Lord's own meal not a Jewish Passover meal. By the time the synoptic gospels were written confusion could have set in and the supper is made into the Passover meal—the problem of biblical conflation.

In this case John the Beloved's version would make a lot of sense—the supper on Thursday was not a Passover meal but a simple meal of the disciples gathering in Jerusalem as they got ready for their Passover celebration. They would need to be there at least a day ahead of the official Day of Preparation in order to secure all the items needed. And since Passover fell on the Sabbath that year there would have been a lot of pressure to be there ahead of time to get things done. They would certainly have an evening meal together as they frequently did. That meal becomes Jesus' farewell and the occasion for him giving them himself in the Eucharist. The night before the Jewish Passover Jesus anticipates it as it were, by giving them the Eucharist which would become the Christian Passover. For the Beloved this is the moment when Jesus' body assumes its rightful place as the new Temple of God and he supplies the prayer of consecration of that Temple. He does not give us details of a Passover meal only of a "supper" (Jn. 13:2, 4). Jesus then is sacrificed the next day, the first day of Passover, he is bleeding on the cross as the lambs are bleeding in the Temple.

John the Beloved sees beyond the meal. He sees the body of Christ, as the place where Father and Son dwell but also where we become one with them:

I in them and you in me that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." Jn 17:23-26

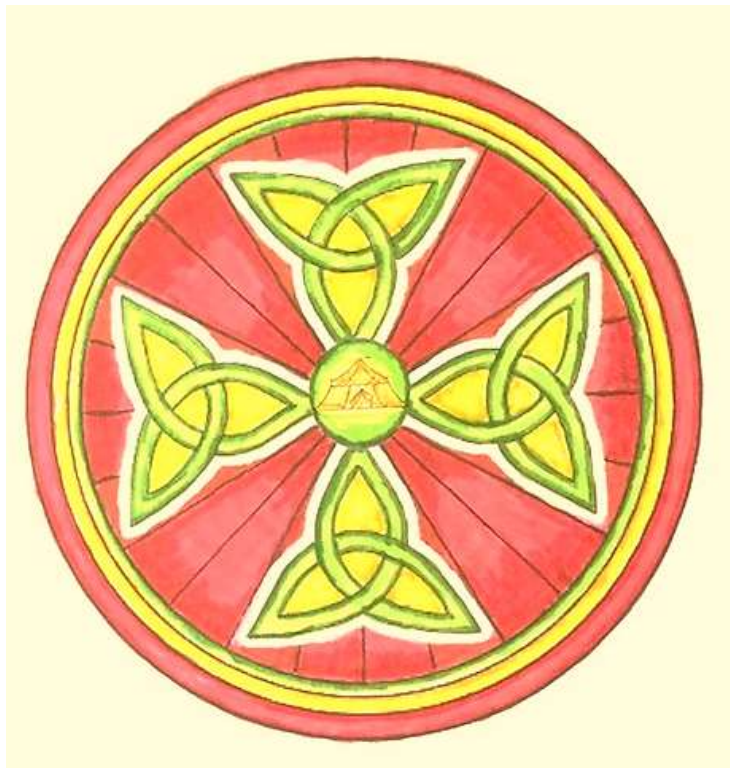
Once this prayer of dedication for the temple of his body was complete Jesus and his disciples went out to the garden of Olives where the sacrifice of the Lamb would begin. In the story of the consecration of Solomon's temple sacrifice immediately followed.



The king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord. Solomon offered as peace offerings to the Lord twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred twenty thousand sheep. Thus the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the Lord. 1 Kgs 8:62-63

John the Beloved's understanding of the cosmic relevance of the body of the Risen Jesus is breathtaking. By comparison, the Jerusalem temple for all its magnificence, is feeble, is time and earth bound. The resurrected body of Jesus is beyond time and supersedes space. It can never be destroyed or replaced. It is truly the place where God's heavenly splendor resides. John the Beloved glimpsed that splendor the night on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus came walking on the waters of the storm. He brings these insights to full fruition in his presentation of the humanity of Jesus as God's dwelling place.

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## I AM the Light of the World

All things came to be through him,  
 and without him nothing came to be.  
 what came to be through him was life,  
 and this life was the light of the human race;  
 the light shines in the darkness,  
 and the darkness has not overcome it.  
 Jn 1:3-5

Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Jn 8:12

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,  
 the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the  
 abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God  
 said, "Let there be light," and there was light.  
 God saw how good the light was.  
 God then separated the light from the darkness.  
 God called the light "day," and the darkness he  
 called "night."  
 Thus evening came, and morning followed--the first  
 day. Gen 1:1-5

It was night Jn 13:10;  
 Day was just breaking Jn 21:4

A better translation for "evening came and morning followed" in the first chapter of Genesis would be "darkness gathered and then light dawned." In the text God does not say that darkness is good--only light. There is a constant re-gathering of darkness and breakthrough of light. The spirituality of John the Beloved was very much wrapped up in the creation stories. His experience on the Lake was profoundly a creation experience. It was dark--darkness which threatened to consume everything. There must have been a certain luminescence about the humanity of Jesus as he walked on the water toward the boat. For the Beloved this was the very light of God breaking through the darkness. Christ was both the light of God and the incarnate Word of God. In his gospel John comes back over and over again to how the darkness is gathering trying to overcome the light until finally "It was night" Jn 13:10, when Judas left to betray Jesus.

Paul also experienced light in association with his experience of the risen Christ (Acts 9). None of the accounts of what happened on the road to Damascus have any mention of a horse but horses have appeared constantly in the artwork associated with this celebration. It was the brightness of the light that stopped Paul in his tracks so that he fell helpless to the ground. The light that engulfed him was so bright he was left sightless for a few days.

Paul refers to Christ as light also: "For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ" 1 Cor 4:6. And again Paul writes in the same sense as the John

the Beloved will write: "For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness" 1 Thess 5:5

In the stories John the Beloved tells in his gospel he uses this background of light/darkness to evaluate the characters in the stories beginning with Nicodemus. In the chiastic scheme of the gospel, the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night is on one side of the arch while Jesus' night time discourse at the last supper is on the other side of John the Beloved's arch. It is quite possible that it was in the home of the family of John the Beloved that Nicodemus came to meet Jesus under cover of darkness. John the Beloved may even have been instrumental in arranging this and then sat in on the meeting and noted with great perception how the conversation went. Many of the same elements show up again in Jesus discourse at the last supper: God's love, being sent, the role of the Spirit, Jesus' coming suffering, darkness. As for Nicodemus, he seems to be what we would call a twilight zone personality. He is attracted by the light, curious, but just can't come out of the darkness, the shadows, to embrace it. He shows up three times but each time fades back into darkness. Toward the end of the conversation with Nicodemus Jesus says: "And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil" Jn 3:19.

When Jesus healed the paralytic by the pool of Siloam (Jn. 5) this man had a remarkable encounter with Jesus the light but he turns his back on it and retreats to the Jewish authorities who were seeking to arrest Jesus. Darkness gathers.

On the other hand when the man born blind comes into the light because of his vision there is a remarkable transformation.

As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" Jn 9:1-5.

This light was lit within the man who had been born blind and he was so transformed that people could hardly recognize him: "His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." Jn 9:8, 9.

He has been changed by the light as well as by being able to see physically so much so that he can declare in imitation of Jesus: "I am." On the first day of creation God created light. In the chiastic arrangement of the days in the creation story, the four day is related to the first day.



On the fourth day God creates the lesser lights all of which take their luminosity from the light of the first day. And so it is in the new creation. Jesus the light shines and when someone fully accepts him, that person also becomes a light. Paul explains it in Second Corinthians: "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ. 2 Cor 4:6. Paul prays that "you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like stars in the firmament offering the word of God. Phil 2:15.

When Jesus stands in the temple and cries out that he is the Light of the World, it is in the midst of the celebrations associated with the feast of Tabernacles. There was a water ritual and a ritual of lights. On the first day of the festival for the ritual of lights, huge candelabra bearing bowls of oil were lighted setting the Court of Women ablaze with flames that could be seen even from a long distance outside the city. The light was reminiscent of the light of glory by which the presence of God had been recognized in the Tent of Meeting and at the dedication of the Temple. During the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus is declaring that he is the true manifestation of the light and glory of God. His claims are mostly ignored. However, the very young disciple who was with him during all the time he spent in Jerusalem noted the words, the gestures and the setting very carefully as a faithful eye-witness.

The young John would not only have been familiar with the light/fire show, he would have noted how during the same feast Jesus proclaimed that he was the light. John the Beloved would also remember the words of Isaiah:

The Light of Israel will become a fire,  
Israel's Holy One a flame,  
That burns and consumes his briars  
and his thorns in a single day Is 10:17

Jesus' followers found this prophesy of Isaiah echoed in the words of the Baptist:

Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Mt 3:10-12.

For John the Beloved, each day of Jesus' ministry was a struggle with the powers of darkness trying to gather around Jesus as it gathered on each of the days of creation. The last mention of darkness in the gospel of John the Beloved is in the last chapter when most of disciples who first met Jesus in the opening of the gospel go fishing with Peter at night. That was common practice because the fish can't see the men and the nets above

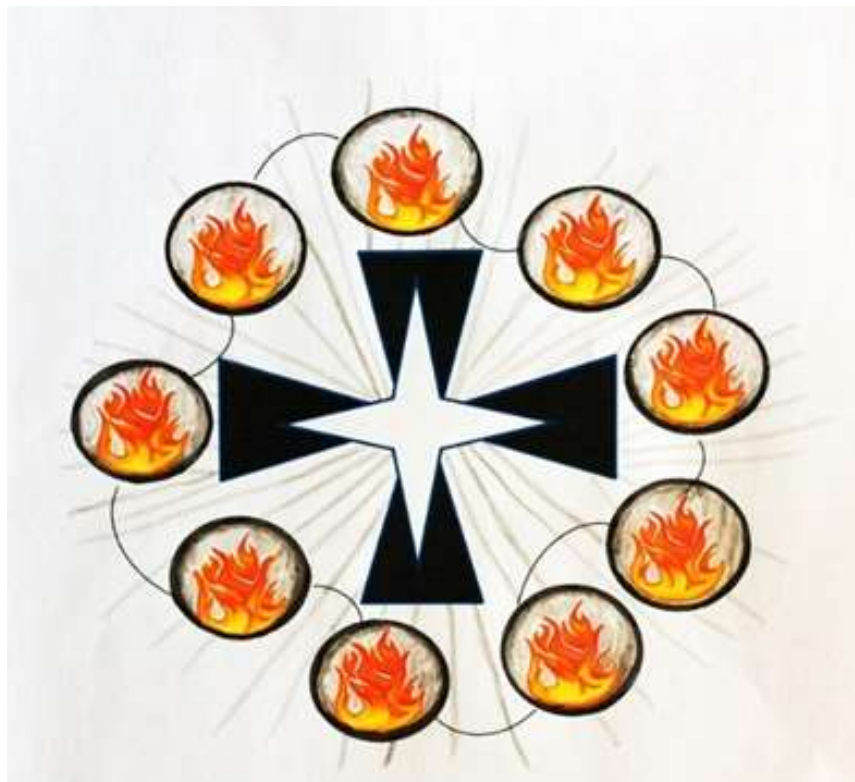
them at night and are more easily caught but sometimes even that trick does not bring in the fish. The Beloved tells us that “day was breaking”--a very significant moment for him--when they saw the stranger on the shore. By this time the Beloved is so conditioned by the juxta-position and co-penetration of the divine with the natural that he immediately recognizes Jesus in the stranger. Possibly a young John had lost his own father at an early age and hence his attachment to Andrew and Peter then ultimately to Jesus. He recognizes Jesus more quickly than the others.

It is daybreak in the new Garden of Eden. God is working (a theme of this gospel) as God had worked at creation in Genesis. Man is invited to work as the first Adam had been assigned to help with creation. As in the first garden, there is an abundance of food, Jesus has already prepared fish for them and they catch another multitude. The story is echoing Genesis as much as it is echoing the event of the multiplication of the loaves and fish earlier in the gospel.

In the scheme of his gospel it is as it were the “eighth” day, the new day, the dawning of the eternal resurrection day because night will never again dim the Light of the world. It is eternal day for those who believe.

...through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race;  
the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it Jn 1:4-5

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## Witnesses

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light. Jn 1:6

An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true;  
he knows that he is speaking the truth,  
so that you also may (come to) believe...Jn 19:35

Mark, Matthew and Luke each wrote their gospels for a particular community of believers and in the process used common sources—stories about Jesus from people who knew people who had known Jesus. They also used each other's gospels. What they wrote was shaped by the spiritual needs of their particular communities and by their personal understanding of the Christ mystery. The situation of John the Beloved stands in marked contrast to this. He also wrote for his community but John the Beloved's gospel is the work of an eye-witness. If not written by him, it was written under his immediate direction while he was still alive. If we accept the hypothesis of modern biblical scholars that the beloved disciple was not one of the twelve but a much younger man perhaps only about sixteen at the time of Jesus' death, he would have been in his late seventies or eighties when the gospel was written in the nineties. After his death as the gospel began to circulate among all the Christian communities, his identity was confused with John the son of Zebedee who was one of the twelve. This confusion has persisted throughout history until modern biblical scholars exposed it.

Realizing that we are dealing with an eye-witness gives us a whole new perspective on what John the Beloved wrote, what he left out and why he wrote. Beginning with the prolog the notion of bearing witness or "testifying" is a major concept of John the Beloved's gospel. John the Baptist is the first witness to testify. As the gospel progresses the stories of more witnesses—the Samaritan Woman, the Man Born Blind, Lazarus --all testify to who Jesus is. But at the heart and center of it all is the witnessing of Jesus to the Father and the Father's witnessing to Jesus.

No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the  
Father's side, has revealed him Jn 1:18

But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the  
Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify  
on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father  
who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard  
his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word  
remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he  
has sent Jn 5:36-8

Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two men can be  
verified. I testify on my behalf and so does the Father who sent me Jn  
8:17-8

"The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I

always do what is pleasing to him." Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him Jn 8:28-30  
 Jesus answered them, "I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify to me." Jn 10:25

After the Resurrection, Mary of Magdala is made the first witness of Jesus' Resurrected body:

Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Jn 20:17

Those who had been with Jesus from the beginning, the other disciples and apostles, were to be witnesses also: "And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning" Jn 15:27

The greatest and most outstanding witness, the One whose presence lasts through the ages is the Spirit: "When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me" Jn15:26. This testimony always remains even though the other human witnesses pass from the earthly stage. There has been a long procession of little men with big egos who with their tidbits of knowledge have thrown themselves against this great witness like moths throwing themselves against a flame. They are burned up quickly and soon forgotten while the flame of the Spirit burns on baptizing in its fire those who come to know Jesus and transforming them into new persons.

This notion of witness is very powerful in John the Beloved's gospel. It is out of his personal sense of identity as an eye-witness that he writes. In his old age the Spirit laid upon him the burden of writing his gospel as his personal testimony. The other gospels had already been written but this personal testimony was still needed by the Christian community—both his community and the Church at large.

If we accept John the Beloved as a unique eye-witness we can begin to see why he wrote the stories which are in his gospel and why he left out some things which the others include. As a young man with ties to Andrew, Peter and Nathanael he sometimes traveled from his home in Jerusalem to Galilee. Thus he was with them for the wedding at Cana, the multiplication of loaves, the night-time sea crossing, and the journey through Samaria when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman. On the other hand, he was not with them for the Transfiguration and the gathering at Caesarea Philippi. When Jesus and his disciples were in Judea and especially in Jerusalem, his home location, he was there attaching himself to Jesus with great mutual affection. This young disciple hung on every word of his master and thus we have the intense dialogues Jesus had with Jewish leaders during the big Jewish festivals—Pentecost, Dedication, Tabernacles, and Passover. Those dialogues are unique to John the Beloved's gospel. They are the memories of the young eye-witness who was there taking in every word. He went with Andrew to visit John the Baptist at the Jordan when Jesus was "baptized." He was present at gatherings in Martha and Mary's home and at the revitalization of Lazarus. He was at the Lord's super resting on Jesus chest and he was in the garden the night of the arrest. Having special access to important people in Jerusalem, he was present all during Jesus' trial. He and Mary of Magdala were at the cross with Jesus' mother when

Jesus died. He was with Peter when Mary told them about the empty tomb. He was with the disciples in the upper room when the risen Jesus came on Easter evening and a week later. Finally he was with them on the fishing trip when Jesus appeared on the shore of the Lake of Galilee.

There is great profundity in John's expose on witnesses. A spiritual experience—one that inter-mingles earthly reality with the realities of the other dimension of life cannot be proven. Our little minds with all their magnificent intellectual capacities cannot encompass both realities simultaneously at least not while we are in this dimension of life. Thus we must accept the testimony of witnesses regarding spiritual realities. It is a situation similar to the experience of love. There is no way to prove definitively what love is. Scientifically we can say and prove that "being in love" causes certain biochemical changes in our bodies—neurotransmitters, endorphins, dopamine release but those reactions are by-products of love not love itself. Love is neither a chemical reaction nor a feeling. Love, when genuine is enduring --it partakes in the timeless nature of God. It is not chemical or emotional. When someone says "I love you, I cherish you, I have great affection for you," the only way we can participate in an exchange of affection is by accepting the testimony of the speaker. The only way we can enter into intimacy with the other is through faith in the other. So too, with God, we have to accept the witness of John the Beloved who tells us that Jesus witnessed to the Father: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" Jn 3:16.

Paul had expressed the witnessing of the Spirit even before John the Beloved wrote his gospel. For Paul, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" Rom 8:16.

Accepting Christ, believing in him is very much a matter of love. Those who come to know such love also know that to experience it, just like with all love, you have to open yourself to it. You have to accept the witness of the one who says "I love you!" God has said: "I love you." And the witness to this is God's only son. And the witness to God's only son is John the Beloved. He finds his identity, his destiny in being that witness. John the Beloved mentions love some seventeen times in his gospel more than any of the other gospels. In this gospel Jesus says that it is by our love that we witness to others: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" Jn 13:34-5. At the end of the gospel of John the Beloved Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him using different words for love—there are many kinds of love. Each time Jesus then asks him to minister to others. In the mind of John the Beloved, there is only one worthy motivation for ministry and that is love which has many expressions. Accepting Jesus and his Father as witnesses is a matter of love. Becoming a witness is a matter of love.

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## The Only Son

And the Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth. Jn 1:14

The Jews answered, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" Jn 19:7

When Jesus had said this, he raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him Jn 17:1,2.

The glory of the only Son is the mutuality of the love he has with the One whose nature he shares. There is nothing more glorious than love that truly is mutually shared between equals. John the Beloved has told us that the Word is not only with God but is God Jn 1:1. And the Word became flesh. For a people whose whole mindset was fiercely to prove that God is One, this is too much!

He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him he gave power  
to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,  
who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice  
nor by a man's decision but of God Jn 1:11-13

John the Beloved is not saying that there are two gods. He is very much affirming the One God, but at the same time he is opening up for us the inner life of that one God as he has experienced it most notably in the storm on the Lake. What John the Beloved finds in this inner life is not subordination --not even the subordination of a son to a father. They--the Creator and the Word, the Father and the Son--are equals in power, in timelessness. Theirs is a relationship in the Spirit, in love--totally mutual love. In the gospel of John the Beloved we find the greatest revelation of that mutuality. The mutuality is found in the statements about what each divine person surrenders to the other.

The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him Jn 3:35.

For the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes. Nor does the Father judge anyone,

but he has given all judgment to his Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him  
Jn 5:20-23

Often we look upon the Father/Son relationship simply in terms of the obedient son going to death at the Father's request, in reality there is a habitual mutuality between them—the Father giving everything to the Son. The Son also giving all back in a wondrous mutual self-surrender.

For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Jn 5:26-7.

When Jesus had said this, he raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began Jn 17:1-5

This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father" Jn 10:17-18.

At first glance it would seem that there is a contradiction in the last quote as Jesus says he is free and can lay down his life on his own but then has received a "command" from the Father. Between two persons who have mutual love the wish of either one is a command for the other.

You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.'  
If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. Jn 14:28

Again at first glance this verse seems to indicate that there is inequality between the Father and the Son. What is indicated is that the nature of the Father is to be the first source—the generator of the Son and the Spirit. It is the nature of the Word, the Son to be a perfect reflection of the Father and equal in nature as it is the nature of the Spirit to be the devotion between Father and Son, a Love equally poured out. So in the sense of the Father's role as first cause, the Father is "greater" or first. The role of the Word is to bring all of creation into the Father's glory in his incarnation and sacrifice. The role of the Spirit is to continue the work of Jesus in us, the work of recreation.

John the Beloved more than any other New Testament writer opens up for us the inner life of God. Being quite young and devoid of the drives of ambition that often troubled the older men, he had an open mind for listening and absorbing what his beloved friend and master said about the relationship between him and the Father. He

realized that in Jesus we have a revelation of the life of God who otherwise was hidden in mystery and majesty. “No one has ever seen God The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side has revealed him” Jn 1:18. To be “at the Father's side” is a way of saying to be equal with.

here that seems out of place: “Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with It has been said that the gospel of John is the gospel most devoted to the divinity of Christ. While that is true, it can also be said that it is the gospel which most reveals the humanity of Jesus especially as regards mutual human affection. Five times John the Beloved is described as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” And Jesus even invited this young man to rest his head on Jesus' chest as a sign of affection. Being so privileged was a memory John the Beloved obviously treasured greatly. This intimate friendship is the foundational source of the gospel of John the Beloved. It is a very human love. But it was not an exclusive friendship as John the Beloved tells us that Jesus also loved the sisters Mary and Martha with their brother Lazarus. Apparently Jesus often enjoyed their hospitality and when Lazarus became ill they sent to tell Jesus: “the one whom you love is ill” Jn. 11:3. John the Beloved makes a comment perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill” Jn. 11:2. He is commenting about how Mary anointed Jesus before the event happens chronologically. For John the Beloved, there are theological issues that are of greater import than chronology. In this case he wanted to mention Mary's close relationship with Jesus—so close that she felt comfortable demonstrating strong signs of affection in public. And he wanted to identify her in this setting where she is concerned about her brother's death just like she will be concerned for Jesus' coming death a short time later. John the Beloved is paying tribute to Mary's strong affection for Jesus and Jesus' response to that.

Some commentators think that John's account of the anointing itself is a conflation of other sources such as the synoptics all three of whom mention a woman anointing Jesus at a meal. Some of the confusion over who these women were arises from the fact that in three of the cases the man hosting the banquet is named “Simon.” Most likely the Pharisee Simon who hosts the meal at which the sinful woman anoints Jesus is not Simon the Leper of Matthew and Mark. Luke says he resided in a city, Bethany was hardly a city. And further Pharisees would not be eating a meal with a leper. Simon probably lived in Bethany because there was a kind of shelter there for the poor and outcasts who were ill or had been and were thus ostracized from society by the Pharisees who considered lepers sinners. Luke who describes the scene with the sinful woman is making a point about how those at table rejected Jesus as a prophet for not recognizing what kind of a woman she was.

Luke also gives us the story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary when Martha was serving and Mary (who is obviously a very different person than the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in Simon's house), is seated at Jesus feet as a disciple a position usually reserved for males. Luke does not conflate the two women, but the same cannot be said for Mark and Matthew who seemingly conflate a meal at a Simon's house in Bethany with the meal at the home of Mary and Martha's house just before Jesus' Passion. They live in Bethany as does Simon the leper. Mark and Matthew seemingly have a need to create a kingly anointing for Jesus as in their version of the story, it is Jesus' head which is anointed. John the Beloved had no such need. For him Jesus had already been anointed at his Baptism. John the Beloved was present at the meal when Mary took the nard and anointed Jesus. The fragrance filled the whole house he tells us as someone who was there. He heard Judas' protests and pretended concern for the poor. It may be because of the poor house at Bethany that Mark and Matthew who do not seem to have been

aware of Jesus' deep friendship with Mary situate the meal at Simon's house. Jesus defends Mary when Judas attacks her.

Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him. Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas the Iscariot, one (of) his disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, "Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions. So Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Jn 12:1-8

This display of tender affection between Jesus and Mary—her anointing him and Jesus defending her—was the last straw for Judas. Judas was in charge of the funds and the fact that Jesus ignored his position in order to defend Mary enraged him. He could not handle the fact that his supposed power, his position in the group as "treasurer" had been passed over. The incident was not conflated by John the Beloved rather he gives us the eyewitness account of what actually happened as someone who was close to Jesus, Mary and Martha. John the Beloved does this to demonstrate both the affection between Jesus and Mary and to signal how Mary intuited Jesus upcoming passion.

At the supper on Thursday evening Jesus proclaims the difference he wishes to exist between what was the current regime of religious authority and how he want things to be among his own: "I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" Jn 15:15 Mutuality should be the hallmark of authoritative activity among his own.

It is John the Beloved who gives us the account of Jesus' close friendship with Mary of Magdala. This Mary was with John the Beloved at the foot of the cross. It was from her that John the Beloved got the details of what happened after he and Peter left the scene of the empty tomb and Jesus appeared to Mary. The Jesus John the Beloved shows us is not only utterly divine but utterly human! In his resurrection he retains affectionate friendship. He responds to Mary's deep distress over losing his body and he tenderly calls her by name. The divine Jesus presented by John the Beloved highly values mutual friendship even in his resurrected state.

In his prolog John the Beloved says "We saw his glory" Jn 1:14. In the Hebrew Testament no one could see the glory of God. Moses had begged to do so:

Then Moses said, "Do let me see your glory!" He answered, "I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, 'Lord'; I who show favors to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will. But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives. Here," continued the Lord, "is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock. When my glory passes I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove

my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen." Ex 33:18

John the Beloved is making the point that those who believe in Christ have seen and can see spiritually the glory of God on the face of the Word made flesh. Moses was not allowed to see God's face, but we are! And there is great depth to this glory. Isaiah also had an experience of the glory of God in the temple in Jerusalem:

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" they cried one to the other. "All the earth is filled with his glory!" Is 6:1

We could say that the first "Holy" of God's glory that the gospel of John the Beloved allows us to experience is when we grasp the mutuality of Father and Word. We see that mutuality in what Jesus tells us about his relationship with the Father and we see a similar mutuality in his close friendships. Mary's nard whose fragrance fills the whole house is a wonderful counterpart to the glory of the Lord filling the temple in Isaiah's vision. It represents both Jesus' total personal sacrifice which was about to take place and the mutuality of his friendships.

The second "Holy" of God's glory which John the Beloved shows us is the realization that the same love the divine Persons have for each other is the love they have for each of us.

And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Jn 17:22-3

This mutual love is not just the love they have for each other but also the love they have for us, made in their image and likeness. John the Beloved had experienced the love of this powerful Lord of glory when the Lord came walking toward them "close to the boat" on the Sea of Galilee.

The third "Holy" of God's glory John the Beloved enables us to experience brings us back to the chiasmic center of his prolog:

But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God Jn 1:12-3

Mutuality is not an end in itself. The divine mutuality and human mutuality as we experience it is always generative! We are generated, born, in this dynamic between the divine persons. And we become participants ourselves in this divine generativity which creates the cosmos, which constantly generates new life and re-creates so to speak the former life. The center of the prolog is not as we would expect "The word became flesh." But rather the center is about the empowerment that comes to those who believe in the name, the person of the only begotten son. By belief we are enabled to enter into

the divine generation which brings us into the intimacy with Father and Son, Creator and Word. And we in turn are sent to be generative: “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” Jn 17:18.

John the Beloved is deeply aware of God’s presence and activity in all of creation. From a certain perspective the gospel chiasm interfaces with the chiastic structure of the Genesis accounts of creation. God is generative! God gave life originally and God expands that life and restores it Jn 17:2.

God created humankind in God’s own image;  
in the divine image God created them;  
male and female God created them.  
God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply. Gen 1:27-8

The Jewish leaders were aware that Jesus claimed to be God’s son not just in the sense of a good person who was godly but in a unique relationship of nature. Rather than open themselves to the remarkable beauty of that relationship and what it could mean for each human person also, they chose to accuse Jesus of heresy: “The Jews answered, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God’” Jn 19:7

John the Beloved has Jesus explain in his beautiful consecration prayer how we become not just those who see the beauty and glory of God but also receive it:

"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Jn 17:20-23

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## I Am a King

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel"  
Jn 1:49

Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus the  
Nazorean, the King of the Jews."

Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was  
crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.  
So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but  
that he said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'"

Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written" Jn 19:19-22

There are two major criticisms which the Jewish people offer of Jesus. The criticisms were offered immediately during Jesus lifetime and after his death. They continue to be offered today as proof that Jesus could not have been the Messiah. One criticism is that he did not fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah. He never delivered his people from the oppression of the occupation of a foreign power and second, he was never anointed as the Messiah/King. David and Solomon, the men who were ideals of kingship had been anointed by a prophet when they became king. John the Beloved was keenly aware of these criticisms and he set about countering them for those who would/could accept the truth about Jesus.

To understand his counter we need to look at the scene of the anointing of the great King and model of the Messiah, David. In that scene Samuel, the last of the Judges of Israel, and the first in a long line of prophets is sent by God to find David whom he does not know but whom the Lord tells Samuel he will recognize when the time comes.

The Lord said to Samuel: "I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons." But Samuel replied: "How can I go? Saul will hear of it and kill me." To this the Lord answered: "Take a heifer along and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I myself will tell you what to do; you are to anoint for me the one I point out to you. 1 Sam 16:1-3

There are parallels here with the Baptism story. It is clear from the dialog of John the Baptist with those who come to him that he is more than just a prophet. He is acting as one of the judges of old did when sitting in counsel, explaining to various groups how to better their spiritual life. Actually the only ones he vehemently exhorts to repentance are the Pharisees and this only in the synoptic gospels. So, John the Baptist is both a prophet, a judge and one "sent" on a special mission. Other prophets will be "sent" and Jesus will refer to himself constantly as one sent. Being sent became the hallmark of the man of God. Samuel is the first to be thus sent and his mission was to inaugurate something new in Israel. John likewise is "sent" to inaugurate something new.

Interestingly the synoptic gospels are eager to present the Baptist in the image of Elijah dressed in camel's hair. Likewise they have Jesus acknowledge or at least give the

nod to the Jewish rumor that Elijah would come back before the Messiah (Mt. 17:24). There are none of these—John dressed as Elijah and Jesus saying that the Baptist compares to Elijah—and preaching repentance, in John the Beloved’s gospel. For him the Baptist was a far more reaching figure encompassing all the prophets and Samuel likewise.

John the Beloved and Andrew were disciples of the Baptist. John does not describe Jesus’ Baptism which could mean that he was not there when it happened but very shortly thereafter he and Andrew arrived. He eagerly listened to the Baptist’s description of his own ministry and what happened with Jesus. Or, as is more likely, that Andrew and he were there but rather than describe the baptism event, John the Beloved, prefers to let the Baptist describe it for himself.

For John the Beloved raised in Jerusalem, the City where David had his center of power, the story of David and David’s anointing would have had great weight. Others, especially those from the north where Elijah had been a prophet, might see in the figure of the Baptist an embodiment of Elijah, but John the Beloved sees someone “sent” as Samuel was sent. His mission is more than preaching repentance. It is personal renewal of the covenant and it includes anointing a King thereby inaugurating something entirely new.

In the story of David’s anointing there was danger from a demented Saul. In the Baptist’s case there is antagonism from Jewish authorities. They are quite concerned about John’s ministry because he is taking over one of the roles of priests in the sanctuary in Jerusalem where people went to buy expensive animals as sacrifices and then told their sins to the priest at the time of the sacrifice to assure forgiveness. This ritual often included purification rites with water. John is setting up a rival to this temple practice. He is offering forgiveness and renewal of one’s covenant with God by simple immersion in the Jordan thereby by-passing the temple requirement of a sacrifice and/or water ablation there.

Samuel created a celebration to bring together the necessary persons for David’s anointing. The Baptist, also specifically sent by God, creates his own version of a ritual which involves the river Jordan so that those who come to hear him can be plunged into it and symbolically cross it again to the promised land as they renew their covenant with the God who gave them the land. The crossing of the Jordan to take charge of the Promised Land was a big event in Israelite history. In the highly stylized and sanitized version in the book of Joshua chapter 4 the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the water of the river by the priests while the people pass over. The action of the Baptist who is himself a priest setting up his baptism ministry in this area of the Jordan on the east bank so that people could cross over again to the Promised Land was loaded with symbolism. John the Beloved tells us: “This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing” Jn 1:28.

The Pharisees and priests from Jerusalem were all over this immediately and they come to challenge him. In his responses the Baptist only identifies himself with the voice spoken of by Isaiah as one crying out in the desert: “He said: ‘I am ‘the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said” Jn 1:23.

Another passage in Isaiah speaks about coming to the water free of cost:

All you who are thirsty,  
 come to the water!  
 You who have no money,  
 come, receive grain and eat;



Come, without paying and without cost,  
 drink wine and milk!  
 Why spend your money for what is not bread;  
 your wages for what fails to satisfy?  
 Heed me, and you shall eat well,  
 you shall delight in rich fare.  
 Come to me heedfully,  
 listen, that you may have life.  
 I will renew with you the everlasting covenant,  
 the benefits assured to David. Isaiah 55:1-3

The scene of John the Baptist's baptismal ministry with all its inherent symbolism and suggestiveness is so dramatic that in the words of Mark: "People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins" (Mk. 1:5). The symbolism was highly suggestive of recapturing their spiritual heritage and doing it freely without having to pay the priests of the temple or undergoing their scrutiny. God told the Baptist to make the ceremony he created a baptism with water because the one whom it would reveal and "anoint" will baptize with the Spirit and fire.

By starting a ministry associated with water and offering it freely to all who wanted to either renew their covenant with the Lord by symbolically re-crossing the Jordan or seek forgiveness for sin, the Baptist was definitely challenging the system in Jerusalem where the priests and Pharisees tightly controlled all religious expression. He was creating a new religious movement which offered a path to relatedness with God not dependent on animal sacrifice. Baptism was an initiation into this movement.

For centuries scholars have debated if Jesus was a disciple of John. The greater likelihood is that they were two men, cousins, who were very like-minded. Both knew that the people suffered greater oppression from their religious leaders than from the occupying Roman force. Those Pharisaical authorities held absolute sway over people's consciences, deciding who could be "right" with God and punishing them for such things as taking too many steps on the Sabbath or eating with unwashed hands. Anyone who disagreed with them they declared a "sinner" even Jesus himself later in the gospel: "So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner" Jn 9:24.

At the time of the Baptism Jesus had not expressed himself publically but it is evident from his ministry that he thought the same as the Baptist. Jesus who was of the same mentality as John the Baptist would have been drawn to go and see what was happening at the Jordan and he would have shown approval by going into the water himself to renew his commitment to the covenant. Jesus arrived with his brothers and/or some of his friends. He goes into the water to renew his commitment to the God of Israel and to affirm this ministry of John of which he heartily approves. Recalling the scene from Joshua, we could say that in the midst of the Jordan is the priest (the Baptist comes from a priestly family) who was to escort the ark and the new ark itself in the person of Jesus. Together they create the spiritual situation where people can again cross over to a new promised land of spiritual renewal. As Jesus stands there, the Spirit descends upon him in a visible form:

I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with

water was that he might be made known to Israel." John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit.' Jn 1:31-33

Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him (David) in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David 1 Sam. 16:13.

Jesus is in the midst of his family/friends who have come with him to the Jordan. David was in the midst of his circle of family and friends. John's baptism of Jesus is the equivalent of Samuel's anointing with the same result—the Spirit “remains” on Jesus. The great difference between David's anointing and Jesus' is that in David's case Samuel anoints David, but in Jesus case it is the Father who anoints Jesus with the Spirit as he comes out of the water. The Baptism has provided the occasion, the setting, but the Father is the one who anoints. To those willing to see/hear it the Father makes visible Jesus' intimate relationship with Father and Spirit and now the Spirit will be evident in Jesus ministerial activity. Augustine once said that by Baptism we “become who we are.” In Jesus' baptism he becomes visibly who he is: the very revelation of the Godself.

The Baptism is likewise an affirmation for John the Baptist. John the Beloved lets John the Baptist speak for himself in describing how God led him to create this baptismal ceremony and what happened to Jesus during it. John has fulfilled what God asked of him and Jesus is revealed to the public. John himself has the insight that Jesus existed (as eternal word) before him: “John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'" Jn 1:15.

Sometimes the rich symbolism imbedded in the gospel of John the Beloved is very subtle like the background of a great painting. You almost do not realize it is there unless you make the effort to enter into his mind and get a feel for how he thought. Largely he assumes that his Jewish converts will catch all the nuances. They may well have done so. But for us thousands of miles and thousands of years away with little sense of how the places John the Beloved speaks about are impregnated with the weight of multiple faith stories, it is not as easily grasped.

John the Beloved is the only evangelist who tells us the rest of what happened by the Jordan and he is anxious for us to know it. The other evangelists wrote of the Baptism from second or possibly third hand sources. John, the Beloved was there. Andrew had taken John with him to go and listen to the Baptist. Andrew then went to find his brother, Simon, and when he introduces Simon to Jesus it is as the “Anointed” (Jn 1:41). John the Beloved deliberately uses the Hebrew form of the word “anointed” recognizing that this issue of being anointed is very much a Hebrew issue and pertains to God's sending a special envoy to bring about the anointing. A few days later John the Beloved tells us that Nathanael proclaimed of Jesus: “You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!” Jn 1:49

Here we have another key concept in John the Beloved's gospel that has its parallel at the end of the gospel. John the Beloved gives us details about Jesus' trial and the inscription Pilate had written over the cross which none of the other evangelists mention. Again the details have the quality of a firsthand witness who had access to high

places in the City of Jerusalem, a young “lad” who as the child of a prominent family could move about freely and who, because of his youth, no one took too seriously. But this young man was exceptionally precocious and sensitive. He understood that Jesus’ kingship was related to truth just as in the conversation with Pilate. Jesus was not interested in political or military power only in the power of the truth which was the way this King would set people free. “Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” Jn 8:31-2. Paul also speaks about freedom:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. Cor 3:17-18.

For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. Gal 5:12-26

It is possible that the nationalistic obsession with political freedom made it impossible for the Jews to discern the “freedom of truth” which Christ was offering them. This kind of obsession is poetically described by Gibran in *The Prophet*.

And an orator said, Speak to us of Freedom. And he answered :  
 At the city gate and by your firesides I have seen you prostrate yourself  
 and worship your own freedom,  
 Even as slaves humble themselves before a tyrant  
 and praise him though he slays them.  
 Ay, in the grove of the temple and in the shadow of the citadel  
 I have seen the freest among you wear their freedom as a yoke  
 and a handcuff.  
 And my heart bled within me; for you can only be free when even  
 The desire of seeking freedom becomes a harness to you and when  
 You cease to speak of freedom as a goal and a fulfillment.

Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus address the issue of political freedom. It is almost as if he is unconcerned about it. When he speaks of being a king in the dialog with Pilate he says that his Kingdom is not of this world and it was for the truth that he has come. That truth is far greater than political maneuvering.

Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants (would) be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Jn 18:35-37

In the scenes in the first chapter of John the Beloved's gospel, he is identifying witnesses—the Baptist describing how he was sent, Andrew saying to Peter: "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed) Jn. 1:41: and the final witness, Nathanael who declares that Jesus is King. These witnesses are all answers to the Jewish assertion that Jesus could not be the Messiah King of Israel. For John the Beloved, the baptism scene is really Jesus' anointing for his ministry as Messiah and King.

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## The Lamb of God

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jn. 1:29

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God. Jn 1:34-36

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Jn 20:20-23

The words John the Baptist used to introduce Jesus to Andrew and the Beloved disciple made a huge impression on John the Beloved. Both John's were from Jerusalem, the city of the lambs, the city where thousands of lambs were slaughtered every Passover and where hundreds more were slaughtered on a constant basis as sin offerings in the temple (prescribed in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

John the Baptist took a public stand against this kind of commercialized abuse of people's consciences when he set up his baptism for forgiveness at the river Jordan. In the story of the man born blind we see this dictatorial control of the Pharisees and chief priests. They declare that Jesus is a "sinner." Obviously they had taken upon themselves the right to decide who was a sinner. For someone to be declared a sinner by them was to incur social and religious rejection in society. The Baptist was keenly aware of the corruption at the heart of the establishment in Jerusalem and he was aware that the constant slaughter of animals was not going to satisfy people's spiritual thirsts or improve their lives. All it was doing was enslaving them financially. There would have to be a fresh start, a new beginning, a change of attitude toward sin. He would also have been aware of psalm 40:

...sacrifice and offering you do not want;  
but ears open to obedience you gave me.  
Holocausts and sin-offerings you do not require;  
so I said, "Here I am;  
your commands for me are written in the scroll. Ps. 40: 7-8

The Baptist was sure that Jesus who had just been revealed to him as the one on whom the Spirit *remains* would be the one to inaugurate such a change. The problem was not just the awful spectacle of the constant slaughter. That was bad enough but the problem at the heart of the matter is the misunderstanding of God generated by this on-going abuse of man and beast. The image of God presented was an image of a wrathful tyrant who demanded blood to satisfy his rage at human sin.

John the Beloved would take this notion to heart and recognize that in Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross which happened during Passover, Jesus had in fact done

away with the need for any sin offerings. And doubtless he was familiar with Isaiah's lamb:

Though he was harshly treated, he submitted  
and opened not his mouth;  
Like a lamb led to the slaughter  
or a sheep before the shearers,  
he was silent and opened not his mouth.

Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away,  
and who would have thought any more of his destiny?  
When he was cut off from the land of the living,  
and smitten for the sin of his people, Is. 53:7-8

Sin—the fear sin, the controlling of others by demanding from them offerings for sin was all done away with in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. At the end of the gospel of John the Beloved there are echoes of what he learned from his mentor John the Baptist, this is especially true of the scene on the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the dead. His greeting to the gathered disciples (hence the whole Christian community) is Shalom! That is—complete peace and well-being. The Lamb shows them his hands and side the proof that the sacrifice is complete and accepted. There is no more need for sacrifices, for controlling people by trying to control their consciences demanding animal sacrifices. Since the old system had proven unworthy even putting Jesus, the Lamb of God to death, in the new creation begun by his resurrection there would be a new administration for dealing with sin and righteousness—it would be the Spirit present in the community. Now, he says that just as he has been sent, he is sending them. He anoints them with his breath—the Spirit that anointed him at the beginning of his ministry and they are to go out and share this good news showing people the way of forgiveness opened up by the Paschal Lamb. The author of the Book of Hebrews had expressed the same notions:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year. Otherwise, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, once cleansed, would no longer have had any consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is only a yearly remembrance of sins, for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins. For this reason, when he came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll,  
Behold, I come to do your will, O God.'" Heb. 10:5-7

The holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying:  
"This is the covenant I will establish with them after those  
days, says the Lord:  
'I will put my laws in their hearts,  
and I will write them upon their minds,'" "

he also says: "Their sins and their evildoing  
I will remember no more."

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.  
Heb.10:15-18

This Lamb of God, the Paschal Lamb, appoints his own as ministers of the Spirit. Those who do not accept them will be left in their sins. Jesus had used this same notion with the Pharisees after he gave sight to the man born blind:

Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains. Jn. 9:40-1

The world needs to see a new image of God—not a God that demands blood sacrifices for sin. The new image is the image of the paschal Lamb—not a God who demands sacrifice, a God who is the Sacrifice! Paul expresses this as the ministry of reconciliation:

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him  
2 Cor. 17-21.

Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Cor. 5:7

It is John the Baptist who through John the Beloved has given us this new image of God. God does not desire sacrifice for sin. God is the sacrifice. It is not God who is reconciled to us—we are reconciled to God through the Lamb of God. There will always be consciousness of sin as each human conscience develops and seeks to mature and there will always be a need for ministers to guide that development of conscience and offer assurance of forgiveness but the notions of sin should never eclipse the goodness of God nor should anyone be held hostage to another human being who seeks to control his or her conscience. The Lamb of God has delivered us from that slavery just like the blood of the Passover Lamb set the Israelites free.

Just as I am - without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,

-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - of that free love  
The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,  
Here for a season, then above,  
-O Lamb of God, I come!

Charlotte Elliot

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## The Son of Man

And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on The Son of Man" Jn. 1:51

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified Jn. 12:23

There are many differences between the gospel of John the Beloved and the synoptics: Mark, Matthew and Luke. John the Beloved does not tell the story of a physical birth but instead gives us the eternal generation of the Word in the depths of the Godself and he shows us how we are to be drawn into that wondrous love. John the Beloved does not give us the words of "institution" at the Last Supper. He had already given a very long intense piece of writing on the Bread of the Eucharist as Jesus' flesh. Instead he gives us the rest of the story of the Supper: the washing of the feet, the Bridegroom's betrothal speech and the consecration of the physical and mystical body of Christ as the new Temple of God. He does not give us Jesus being consoled by an angel in the garden of Olives instead he gives us Jesus being affirmed by the Father as he enters the city and the final week of his life. But one of the most striking features that the gospel of John the Beloved does have in common with the synoptics is Jesus' self-description. John the Beloved places on Jesus' lips, as do the synoptics, the self-descriptive term "Son of Man."

And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man Jn 1:51.

These words were spoken to Nathanael when Jesus arrives in Galilee after his Baptismal experience at the Jordan in Judea. John the Beloved is the only evangelist to mention Nathanael and it is safe to assume a close connection between John the Beloved and Nathanael whom he twice mentions. Nathanael was from Cana. John the Beloved was at the wedding in Cana and was at Cana again with Jesus when he cured the dying son of an official from Capernaum. Nathanael was with the group of disciples who had breakfast at dawn on the sea shore after Jesus' resurrection.

In his comment to Nathanael Jesus is referring to Jacob's experience near Bethel where Jacob stopped to spend the night when he was journeying away from his enraged brother Esau. During a dream he saw messengers of God moving up and down a stairway to heaven. He experienced the presence of the Lord there beside him.

And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying:  
"I, the Lord, am the God of your forefather Abraham and the God of Isaac Gen 28:13

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he exclaimed, "Truly, the

Lord is in this spot, although I did not know it!" In solemn wonder he cried out: "How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!" Gen 28:16-7

The place where Jacob stopped to spend the night was very near where Abraham had spent a night during the journey he made in obedience to God traveling to the holy land. There Abraham had built an altar to God. Jacob "consecrated" a stone with oil to remember his dream. The physical location and references to it were (are) loaded with meaning for Jews—God was in that place, the God to whom they were bound by destiny.

We can well imagine how many times after Jesus' resurrection John the Beloved and his friend Nathanael talked about Jesus' words to Nathanael that day. What Jesus had really said was that Nathanael (and the disciples) were going to discover that Jesus is the abode of God, the gateway to heaven and all communication with heaven passes "up and down" through Jesus, the "Son of Man."

The term "Son of Man" has many meanings and had been used in various contexts in the prophets but the most notable context is in the book of Daniel:

As the visions during the night continued, I saw  
One like a son of man coming,  
on the clouds of heaven;  
When he reached the Ancient One  
and was presented before him,

He received dominion, glory, and kingship;  
nations and peoples of every language serve him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that shall not be taken away,  
his kingship shall not be destroyed. Dan 7:13-4

Jesus applies this vision to himself by adding "The" to the title. He is not simply a "son of man" in its various Hebrew connotations or as God addressed Ezekiel. He is "the" "Son of Man" from the vision of Daniel—one who is fully human but also divine and receives from the Ancient One dominion, glory and kingship. His reign is eternal.

In the chiasmic structure there is the principle of "more"—that is, the second side of the poetry or poetic arch gives an addition to the thought expressed on the first side. Within the big chiasm which is the whole of John the Beloved's gospel there are mini arches. One of the reasons for writing this way was that not many people could read and write and it was easier for a storyteller to remember the story this way. Storytellers were very important persons within a community in a preliterate society. In this section of what we have come to designate as chapter one of John the Beloved's gospel, John is telling the story of how Jesus was being introduced. He has already explained how John the Baptist introduced Jesus to himself and Andrew as the Lamb of God. They introduce him to Simon. Immediately thereafter in Galilee Jesus encounters Philip who is from the town of Andrew and Simon. Jesus asks Philip to follow him. Philip in turn introduces Jesus to Nathanael.

The next day he decided to go to Galilee, and he found  
Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from

Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth" Jn 1:43-5.

At the center of this mini-chiasm are Jesus' comments regarding Nathanael. Then the second side of the chiasm begins and Jesus describes himself in terms of Jacob's dream about the presence of God and concludes by using the term "The Son of Man." So in this mini chiasm we have the contrast between "son of Joseph" which Jesus was recognized to be and "The" Son of Man which Jesus is revealing himself to be. Both are true. He is fully human—the son of Joseph—and he is The Son of Man to whom the Ancient of Days, the Father, gives all dominion and power. The second side of the chiasm complements and enhances the first side. It is a poetic way of Jesus identifying his sonships.

Because this is the gospel of John the Beloved we also have to be aware that there are insights to be gained from understanding John the Beloved's affinity for creation and the lessons creation teaches us about God. In most cases where John states that Jesus used the term "The Son of Man" there is some reference to coming down/going up. This is most striking in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" Jn 3:13-5

Likewise over the course of the dialog about the Bread from Heaven he talks about the Bread that has come down and will go up again: "What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" Jn 6:62.

In creation the only thing which we can observe making this movement of coming down and going up again is water vapor—clouds, like the clouds which carry the Son of Man in Daniel's vision. John the Beloved has pondered the beautiful passage in Isaiah about the word of God coming down:

As high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so high are my ways above your ways  
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

For just as from the heavens  
the rain and snow come down  
And do not return there  
till they have watered the earth,  
making it fertile and fruitful,  
Giving seed to him who sows  
and bread to him who eats,

So shall my word be  
that goes forth from my mouth;  
It shall not return to me void,  
but shall do my will,  
achieving the end for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:9-11

Isaiah had compared water to God's word and John the Beloved makes the further comparison that the Word of God comes down to become incarnate, makes his disciples fertile and fruitful with his teaching and presence and then this Word returns to the Godself "achieving the end for which it was sent."

The other places where John the Beloved quotes Jesus as referring to himself as "The Son of Man" are affirming of the powers he has been given by the Father just like the figure in Daniel's vision: "And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man" Jn 5:27.

The one place where neither Daniel nor "lifting up" are being discussed is in the story of the man born blind. However, even here there is a gradual ascension of understanding like an arising cloud. First the man says of Jesus "that man." Then in the next round of discussion Jesus becomes "a prophet." Further on he becomes someone "from God." And finally: "When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, Jesus found him and said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'" Jn 9:35.

Since all of the evangelists quote Jesus as using this term to refer to himself, it is likely that it was one of the ways Jesus self-identified. John the Beloved ties that self-identification to a sense of descending and ascending which in turn matches the vision of Daniel seeing the Son of Man in the clouds.

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## The Tree of Life

Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree" Jn 1:48.

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe" Jn 20:27

In the second creation story in Genesis, there are two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Good and Evil. "Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad" Gen 2:9. The sad ending of the tale is that because man and his wife wanted to be like God and ate the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil which they were told not to eat, they were banished from Eden and the way to the tree of Life is forbidden to them.

Then the Lord God said: "See! The man has become like one of us, knowing what is good and what is bad! Therefore, he must not be allowed to put out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life also, and thus eat of it and live forever" Gen 3:22.

John the Beloved also has these two trees in the beginning of his gospel but because we are so far removed from his culture, it is hard for us to recognize them. In the mind of the Christian community the Tree of Good and Evil was a fig tree. Apparently the Pharisees who so bitterly opposed Jesus and instigated his death had favorite fig trees in and around the city of Jerusalem. Seemingly it was under these trees with their large leaves created shade that they held classes for their disciples. First Century Rabbinical literature talks about Pharisaical leaders having such teaching sessions under a fig tree near Jerusalem. In the mind of the first Christians the fig tree became associated with the Tree of Good and Evil especially since according to the Genesis story Adam and Eve covered their naked bodies with fig leaves after their sin of eating from the tree. It was only in the middle ages in Europe that the Tree of Good and Evil came to be seen as an apple tree probably because apple trees were more abundant in Europe than fig trees.

In the gospels of Mark and Matthew there is a tradition about Jesus cursing a fig tree near Bethpage where there was a Pharisaical Center on the way into the city of Jerusalem. Luke does not tell the story of the cursing of the tree but rather offers a parable about the fig tree which for three years had not borne fruit. John the Beloved does not mention the fig tree except in Jesus' dialog with Nathanael and this forms part of a mini-chiasm beginning with the mention of the fig tree. Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree" Jn 1:48. This could well mean that Jesus' had observed Nathanael debating with the Pharisees under a fig tree and rejecting their philosophy—their duplicity. Hence Jesus had complimented Nathanael: "Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him'" Jn 1:47. Nathaniel was won over by Jesus' knowledge of him.

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" Jn 1:49-51.

In the last line about the Son of Man, we see a veiled reference to the Tree of Life (a ladder for ascending and descending is made from wood). It complements the fig tree at the beginning of the mini-chiasm and John will make use of this notion of Jesus as the tree of life at the end of the gospel where he has the spiritual twin (Didymus) of Nathanael, who is Thomas, asking to place his hand in the side of the risen Jesus.

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jn 20:24-27

The words Jesus uses to Thomas "put your finger here and bring your hand" are similar to what man was forbidden to do when expelled from Eden. "He might put out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life also, and thus eat of it and live forever" Gen 3:22. After the resurrection there is a new Tree of life or the actual tree of life in place of the mythological one and man is invited to bring his hand to touch and take the fruit of eternal life. This tree of life closes one of the dualisms of the great chiasm of the gospel of John the Beloved. Nathaniel on the one side of the arch would see Jesus as the stairwell to heaven and the Son of Man. Thomas, Nathaniel's twin, on the other side of the arch sees the Risen Christ as his Lord and God, as the Tree of Life, which has once again united heaven and earth.

For St. John Chrysostom, one of the early Catholic theologians, a tree is a wonderful nature icon of the Trinity. The Father is represented by the roots hidden from sight in eternity, the ground of our being. The trunk which is visible represents Christ who lived among us in a very visible manner. The sap circulating between trunk and roots represents the Holy Spirit shared by Father and Son.

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## The Bridegroom

So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one Who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him." John answered and said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said (that) I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete" Jn 3:26-29

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be Jn14:3.

John the Baptist is the one who gives us this beautiful title for Jesus although the synoptic gospels hint of it in the parable of the ten bridesmaids where Jesus describes the procession of the bridegroom to meet fetch the bride and take her back to his father's home (Mt 25:1-10). And in each of those gospels Jesus indirectly refers to himself as the bridegroom in the discussions about fasting. John the Beloved gives us this title for Jesus in the words of the Baptist as well as another title for John the Baptist himself, "the groom's best friend." These titles are part of a response John the Baptist makes to a group of his disciples who feel that Jesus' disciples are stealing John's act as it were, by also baptizing. It seems that public figures always attract some people who have a "fan" mentality. The person they are following becomes their idol and they invest immense emotional energy into that person. Paul had the same problem with some of the Corinthians:

I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I give thanks (to God) that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. 1 Cor 1:10-15

Paul was pointing out the foolishness of such attitudes which miss the point that all ministers are only guides to Christ. John the Baptist makes the same point but in a way that enhances Jesus' identity and shows how he, the Baptist, rejoices at the very sound of the Bridegroom, Jesus', voice. For John the Baptist, there can be no sense of rivalry between himself and Jesus. He is trying to move his disciples out of this fan-club mentality. In doing so he invokes one of the great images of the Hebrew Scriptures: God as Spouse of humanity.

On that day, says the Lord, She shall call me "My husband,"  
Hosea 2:18

I will espouse you to me forever:  
I will espouse you in right and in justice,  
in love and in mercy;

I will espouse you in fidelity,  
and you shall know the LORD. Hosea 2:21-2

This word of the Lord came to me: Go, cry out this  
message for Jerusalem to hear!  
I remember the devotion of your youth,  
how you loved me as a bride,  
Following me in the desert,  
in a land unsown Jeremiah 2:1-2

Look about and see,  
they are all gathering and coming to you.  
As I live, says the Lord,  
you shall be arrayed with them all as with adornments,  
like a bride you shall fasten them on you. Isaiah 49:18

There is one book in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Song of Songs, that does not even mention God yet it was kept as a part of the sacred writings because this poetic representation of the relationship between man and woman was also considered to be a representation of the relationship between God and humanity. Verses from the Song were used as part of wedding rituals. Weddings were seen as "covenants" and the covenant was sealed with a cup of wine representing the blood of the Passover covenant. Often the groom wore a crown during the days of the ceremonies:

In the crown with which his mother has crowned him  
on the day of his marriage,  
on the day of the joy of his heart. Song 3:11

For John the Beloved, always contemplating the Christ-event through the lens of the creation stories in Genesis, this notion of God espousing humanity took on tremendous new meaning. In Gen 2:24 we read: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body." John could see the Word, the Son, leaving his heavenly Father to go and fetch his bride (in this case all of creation) and bring her back to his Father's house. That was the Jewish wedding



custom. When the betrothal ceremony was over the groom went home to start work on a new area of his father's house where he and his bride would live. Sometime after the betrothal once the groom had prepared a place for her in his father's house, the Bridegroom would go in procession to claim the bride and take her to his father's home.

In the gospel of John the Beloved we can see as it were Jesus' marriage being arranged for him by his mother (it was the Jewish custom for parents to arrange weddings). They are at a wedding in Cana and she asks him to intervene in the crisis of the shortage of wine. At her behest he begins his signs even though he protests that his hour has not yet come:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Jn 2:1-5

He said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him. Jn 2:10-11

At his mother's bidding he begins to reveal himself and search out those who Believe in him (his bride). John tells us that those who were there (including obviously himself) "began to believe." The courtship had begun. Jesus would speak frequently of his hour in the gospel of John the Beloved. His hour would be the hour which saw both his supreme humiliation, his total human self-emptying and his glorification by the Father. There is an Orthodox tradition which sees Jesus wearing his crown of thorns as the Bridegroom wearing his crown at his wedding ceremonies. Jesus mother would be there at his hour of consummation on the cross. When it was consummated he had paid the price for his bride: "When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit" Jn 19:30. The wine at his own wedding was terribly bitter but he took it finishing his work and prepared to "hand over" the Holy Spirit to his bride which he will do on the evening of the first day of the week.

From another perspective which John the Beloved loves to dwell on, in the same second account of creation woman initiates the eating of the forbidden fruit and now in John the Beloved's eyes, in the new creation the "Woman" as John has Jesus address his mother, initiates partaking of the fruit of the new creation -- wine, the wine of gladness, the wine of a wedding.

Some of the indications that John the Beloved is looking at things from the perspective of Genesis is the mentioning of the garden. The Genesis stories take place in a garden. John is the only evangelist to speak of the area of the Mt. of Olives as a "garden" and he does so three times as he mentions that the place where Jesus was arrested, crucified and buried was in a "garden." A great deal of the imagery of the Song of Song which celebrates love is also in a garden.

John the Beloved inserts into his account of the supper the night before Jesus died words used at a betrothal meal. Jesus makes the same promises to his disciples gathered there that a Jewish groom makes to his bride:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Jn 14:2-3

Jesus is the Bridegroom who has espoused them (humanity) and now is going back to his father's house to prepare place for his bride whom he will come and take to himself. This kind of wedding language they can understand:

I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." His disciples said, "Now you are talking plainly, and not in any figure of speech Jn 16:28-9.

It is no wonder that the early church expected the return of the Lord at any time. The Bridegroom had promised to come and take his bride home. John the Beloved himself as he was writing his gospel thought that the reason why he had not been put to death like so many of the first disciples was that he was meant to be still on earth when the Bridegroom returned and then he would die:

Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved, the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper and had said, "Master, who is the one who will betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me." So the word spread among the brothers that that disciple would not die. But Jesus had not told him that he would not die, just "What if I want him to remain until I come? (What concern is it of yours?)" Jn 21:20-23

The centuries that have passed since then have taught us to recognize that the coming happens for each of us at the time of our individual death when we receive the call that the Bridegroom is at the door waiting. It is then that we will become truly one with him as the bride and groom are one: "And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one. Jn 17:22.

During the betrothal ceremony the groom would give the bride a cup of wine. John the Beloved sees the blood that came from Christ's side at his death as this gift of wine recalling the words of Jesus in the Bread Discourse: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" Jn 6:56.

The last of the seven blessings pronounced over Jewish newlyweds was "You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, creator of the fruit of the vine." And in Psalm 128 a fruitful vine is mentioned in the context of marriage: "Like a fruitful vine, (be) your wife within your home," Ps. 128:3. It is at this supper of betrothal that Jesus talks about the Vine:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,

and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.  
Jn 15:1-2

While the Hebrew scriptures refer to the relationship of man and woman as reflecting God's love for humanity, they could not open the deeper meaning of how humanity (creation) is destined to experience the love in the heart of the Godself—a oneness like the oneness of Father and Son in the Spirit. It is John the Beloved who reveals the love of the Persons of the Trinity. He shows us how we are destined to become part of that, to "live because of me, just as I live because of the Father" (Jn 6) as we accept his nuptial gift of himself experienced now as the Bread of Life while we await the full embrace in the Father's house.

Marriage between two humans can be an icon of the union of the Persons of the Trinity under certain circumstances when there is true mutuality and equal self-surrender, but often that does not happen. Paul sees one of the values of celibacy that it helps to keep the eyes of the church on the Lord (I Cor 7) such celibacy is a form of prophecy which teaches the church to look to eternal love. Whether or not someone experiences happiness in marriage, or remains single by choice or fails to find and experience human love with a partner, we are all destined to experience and become part of the love relationship at the heart of the Godself. Everyone is not only invited to the wedding of the Lamb, each of us is the bride (Rev 19:9).

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let the hearer say, "Come."  
Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it  
receive the gift of life-giving water. Rev 22:17.

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## I AM He (the Messiah)

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed) Jn 1:40-1.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. Jn 20:30-31

While Matthew and Mark repeat for us the fierce tongue-lashing which John the Baptist (Elijah-like in their eyes) gave the Pharisees who came out to where he was baptizing in the Jordan, John the Beloved is the only one who tells us about the exchange between the Baptist and the Pharisees as they seek to discover just who he is:

And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites (to him) to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Messiah." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?" Jn 1:19-25

"The" prophet who was expected to come was one foretold by Moses: "A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen" Deut. 18:15. Moses was regarded as a prophet, those who followed -- Joshua and then the judges were not considered prophets. Prophecy does not appear as a major feature of Judaism until the people ask for a king and then immediately God begins calling prophets to be, as it were, the conscience of the people and to help them and the kings remain faithful to the covenant. Prophecy died out after the Exile in Babylon. But there was still the expectation that one like Moses would come to lead the people again and this expectation became more intense when there was political oppression such as that under the Roman occupation. And so the Pharisees want to know who John the Baptist is. Is he Elijah the prophet returned? Is he "the" Prophet foretold by Moses? Is he the Messiah? They were obviously not only aware of the prophecy of Moses but also of the intense expectations of the people in this regard. And they wanted to short-circuit any false Messiah. But John the Baptist was very frank

about the fact that he has no delusions of personal grandeur. He is not the prophet, not Elijah and not the Messiah.

The Pharisees were not the only ones sensitive to the issue of a promised Messiah. Those who gathered around John the Baptist cherished a hope in a Messianic figure. Those who were highly dissatisfied with the legalistic oppression of the religious leaders were especially interested in this possibility. This was certainly a factor in why people gathered around the Baptist and then around Jesus. The synoptic gospels give the impression that Jesus went to the sea shore and found four of his disciples and out of the blue as it were asked them to follow him. But John the Beloved gives us a broader picture. Some of these men had taken off of work to make the journey to visit the Baptist at the site of his baptisms on the Jordan not too far from Jerusalem. The Baptist had introduced them to Jesus. When Jesus next travels to Galilee he seeks them out and at his invitation they begin to accompany him more constantly. They thought of him as the Messiah but Jesus does not actually proclaim himself to them as such. And he knows that one of his most difficult tasks will be to convince them of the validity of his vision of the Messiah compared to the prevalent one.

It is only to the Samaritan woman that he proclaims himself as Messiah and in a context where they are talking about worshipping God in Spirit and truth.

Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you" Jn 4:21-6

Jesus' objective is bringing people into the relatedness he shares with the Father. It has nothing to do with nationalistic concerns; whereas for most Jews the Messiah was someone who would restore the glory of their nation. Instead of having all nations come to Jerusalem, Jesus will send his disciples out to all nations not to conquer but to share the good news of the Kingdom of God, a very different Kingdom than any earthly kingdom. Nationalism is to a people what egotism is to an individual. It often creates arrogance and notions of superiority. It becomes a religion in itself in competition with God while pretending to serve God. Certainly there have been times in the history of Christianity when we too have gotten caught up in trying to be an earthly kingdom and when we do so, we betray the gospel.

In his prolog John the Beloved comments: "He came to those who were his own, but his own people did not accept him Jn. 1:1. And at the end he writes: "Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end Jn. 13:1. During his ministry Jesus formed a people of "his own." It is they he would come to after his resurrection. It is them he would breathe his own Spirit into and send into the world as he had been sent by the Father: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit" Jn 20.

Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Mt 28:18-20

The Jewish people have many glorious things in their history: the revelations to Abraham who is the father of faith, Moses, the Law, the Prophets, David. The most glorious thing in divine revelation they are not able to acknowledge. They birthed the Christ, the one whom the Father consecrated, sealed and anointed with the Spirit. How marvelous! Salvation does come from the Jews as Jesus told the Samaritan woman.

John the Beloved testifies that it was to share his belief that Jesus is the Messiah that he wrote his gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name Jn 20:30-31.

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## I AM the Living Bread

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world Jn 6:51

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." Jn 6:53-58

We have reached the center of the arch, the heart of John the Beloved's gospel. What we know as chapter six of the gospel of John the Beloved is the apex of his chiastic arch. This chapter contains three distinct stories --one about the multiplication of the loaves, one about the crossing of the sea and one about the discussion of the Bread from Heaven. There are three reasons why John the Beloved placed the storm at sea with the experiences regarding food on either side of it as the chiastic center of his gospel. The first reason is, of course, his own experience that night on the Sea of Galilee. It was his own baptism into the Godself as Creator, Word and Spirit.

The second reason John the Beloved made this the apex of his arch was what he sensed and saw in Jesus after the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus himself had initiated the feeding of the huge crowd on the grassy hillside. But when the people then wanted to mob him and make him the new Moses or David, he fled in revulsion. By the time the disciples were getting ready to get into the boat and go back across the Sea late in the evening, he still had not returned to them. He only came to them walking on the water during the storm. The next day in Capernaum Jesus was very cool to the people who came in search of him. Immediately he lays out in no uncertain terms who he is and how that identity is as the true "Bread from Heaven." An argument ensued and Jesus became even more vehement. John the beloved was a supersensitive, highly observant young man. This determination of Jesus and Jesus' rejection of any political acclaim made a deep impression on him.

The third reason John the Beloved made this story the chiastic center of his gospel is the attitude of the disciples. This was a crucial turning point: "As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him" Jn 6:66. The ones who were left would be the ones to gradually make the same shift in mentality that had already happened in the young John the Beloved. They could not grasp exactly what was going on but they knew in their hearts (all except for Judas) that they believed in Jesus whoever he said he was:

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus

answered them, "Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?" He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve Jn 6: 67-71.

It would not be until after the Resurrection that these men would come into a faith that they understood, but they were willing to cling to Jesus and seek understanding. In his gospel, Mark also indicates that they did not understand about the loaves at the time (Mk. 6:52). For John the Beloved this is the same journey he would see so many persons make in his later community. They would have an attraction to Jesus, but they would have to make a "passover" from belief in the One God of Judaism to belief in the fullness of that One God in the revelation of the inner life of the Godself as Father, Son and Spirit.

It can be helpful in understanding the sequences in this High point on the chiasmic arch of John the Beloved to translate the verbal triptych into a visual one. The difference from one side of the arch to the other is that of giving bread and being bread.



On the first side we have the bread and fish which fed the multitudes. John the Beloved tells us it was close to the Jewish feast of Passover (Jn. 6:4) The Passover celebrates the passage of the Jewish community from Egypt including passing through the strip of dry land created by the wind in the bed of the sea of Reeds and then being fed in the desert by manna or "bread from heaven." The crowd sees in Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes a replication of how their forefathers were fed by God in the desert during the Passover. That had been a miracle which sustained the community for their journey to the Promised Land. However, John thinks of Passover more in terms of the Paschal Lamb, the lamb which was slain and eaten while its blood was smeared on the door lentils. Eating the lamb and witnessing its blood being rubbed on the altar in the temple was the highlight of the Jewish celebration of Passover in the Temple in Jerusalem where he grew up. The blood had to be completely drained from the animal for the sacrifice to be considered acceptable. Blood is the symbol of life and all blood had to be removed for the sacrifice. These considerations are in evidence in what Jesus will tell his listeners on the second side of the triptych.

On that side of the triptych we see the symbols of the Christian Eucharist, the food that sustains the Christian community in their journey through life to the Father's house. Jesus draws strong contrasts between the two sides. He chides the Galileans who want to make him their bread king because they were looking for wonders and



seeking only to satisfy physical hunger. When Jesus explains to them that he is the true “Bread from heaven,” the one who was with God and sent by God, they cannot make that movement, cross that sea, in their minds. Unable to embrace the greater reality, they fall back into what they know:

The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven?' Jn.6: 41-42

Prophets were known by whose sons they were:

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem Isaiah 2:1.

The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of a priestly family in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin Jer 1:1.

The word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar Ezek 1:3.

Those to whom Jesus spoke were willing to accept Jesus as a new Moses, possibly “The” prophet Moses said would come after him, but the notion of Jesus as God and further as food to be eaten in place of the manna of the desert was just too much for them. Jesus almost pleads with them saying that prophets are taught by God and they too could be taught by God if they would open their minds.

There was, however, a sea of difference in the way they thought and the way Jesus thought. For most Jews of the first century ideas of the afterlife were very mixed and having a good life here and now was the best manifestation of being in favor with God. Many Jews did not believe in afterlife at all (and still do not). Others had a mixture of ideas. Judaism had been influenced by Zoroastrianism during the exile in what was Persia. Zoroaster was a remarkable man who believed in one God. He introduced or elaborated upon primitive notions of resurrection at the end of time; also notions of angels, heaven (Paradise), hell, and judgment in religion. He championed free will, denounced slavery and decried animal sacrifice. But his ideas about resurrection had not taken hold for most of the Jews. For those Jews who did believe in resurrection, in particular the Pharisees, it was mostly a debate of how a body would be rehabilitated after death.

As Jesus argued with these Jewish persons in Capernaum he constantly came back to the idea that if you eat his body and drink his blood you will “not die.” This most likely meant to his hearers that he was saying that you would not be relegated to non-existence or a shadowy existence in the nether world after physical life ceased. In the course of the argument Jesus adds that he will raise (resurrect) the believer on the last day. For Jews the “last day” would probably have meant the end of the world in the sense of the apocalyptic writings (Daniel, Ezekiel) and possibly those of Zoroaster. For Christians in John the Beloved’s community reading this later, it would have meant on the day when the Bridegroom came back to fetch his bride--the Christian community. In either case, during the discourse after the lake-crossing Jesus is postulating the idea of a life after this life that would be even more fulfilling than the present life. These

people had been so conditioned to thinking only in terms of the present life that they could not get their minds around this idea. They only wanted bread here and now.

Actually in this scene close to the feast of Passover as John the Beloved notes, Jesus is positing himself as the new Paschal Lamb. He is the meal prior to this new Exodus in that they eat his flesh and further drink his blood so that both flesh and blood are involved.

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Jn 6:53-56

Four times in three verses Jesus insists on the importance of drinking his blood. John the Beloved saw this as a necessary component of the Eucharistic meal because it acknowledges the sacrifice of the Lamb whose blood was drained from his body in the sacrifice. Likewise, Paul and the other evangelists all insist that the drinking of the wine transformed into Jesus' blood is essential to the Eucharistic sacrifice. John the Beloved also notes how he saw the last drops of blood being shed by this Paschal Lamb:

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may (come to) believe. For this happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled: "Not a bone of it will be broken" Jn 19:33-36.

The Passover involves two meals—the Paschal Lamb and the manna in the desert. The meal of the Lamb initiates the journey, the manna sustains it. For us the Lord's supper is both our passover and what sustains the journey through life.

Our involvement with the blood of Christ (drinking the wine rather than having it sprinkled on us) is our way of saying "amen" to the sacrifice of Jesus and signaling our willingness to follow his example of obedience to death. In his sacrifice his blood was separated from his body. When we receive both we are symbolically reunited them also indicating our belief in the Resurrection where they were brought together again in Jesus' living flesh. John the Beloved is the only evangelist who gives us this extended theology of the Eucharist asking us to move beyond seeking bread just for our present bodily needs like those who followed Jesus to get more bread. John the Beloved asks us to recognize the Passover Lamb and to recognize that eating his body and drinking his blood brings us into profound communion with him and the Father now and in the life to come.

Most likely John the Beloved's community used this tryptic of the multiplication of loaves, the Sea crossing and the Eucharist for sacramental catechesis --that is to prepare converts for baptism and receiving the Eucharist. They would have had discussions about being immersed in the new creation and recognizing Father, Word and Spirit and then more discussions of the meaning of eating the Christian Passover

meal which was the meal of passing over from death to life, from the first creation to the new creation. To understand the scriptures we need to realize how they were written for and used in the rites and rituals of the early church.

A personality trait of John the Beloved shows up in how he has Jesus express himself toward the end of the argument in chapters six and eight). John the Beloved in his passionate love of Jesus truly believed that if people were not converted and did not eat the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, they would not have eternal life and he records Jesus as saying as much. This statement (and a couple others in the gospel) most likely represents John the Beloved's own judgmental personality type and unfortunately opened the gates for a slew of hate sayings between non-Christians (Jews and others) and Christians who took it as their right to judge who would get into heaven and who would not. Fortunately the other gospels, in particular Matthew, give a broader perspective as in the story of the "Judgment of the Nations" in Matthew 25:31-46. In this judgment scene no mention is made of what belief the participants have. They are judged solely on the grounds of how they have treated their fellow human beings. John the Beloved could admit that God is greater than our hearts: "(Now) this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything" 1 Jn. 3:19. Actually God is greater than our minds also and has ways of getting around our inability to grasp certain concepts.

If John the Beloved's understanding of Jesus and what Jesus said lacked breadth in some ways, it did not lack depth. He grasped Jesus' identity as the Only Son who came to open us to us the riches of the inner-life of God and he understood that the gift of uniting us to himself in the Eucharist, the eating and drinking of Jesus' resurrected body and blood was not only the perfect sacrifice in that the one sacrificed is eaten, it was also the ultimate gift of divine intimacy—the food that would sustain us, give us a little taste of heaven even while we are on our journey to heaven. He understood that Jesus was not talking cannibalism but rather of a union between his resurrected body which, while still being fully human is no longer constrained by the limitations which physical bodies have in their present state of mass, and ourselves who are still so constrained.

Being baptized into Christ and receiving him in the "Breaking of the Bread" as the early church called the Eucharist was for John the equivalent of making that crossing of the sea at night, being reborn as it were and then being fed by the one into whom you were baptized. And all of this is summed up in this apex of his chiasm.

In the final analysis the arguments about the Eucharist are about who Jesus is (Is he God or not). If he is God, would God want such a physical intimacy with us? And lastly how can such an intimacy come about.

It is not possible to "prove" that Jesus was God. Jesus tells us that to do the work of God is to believe in him (Jn 6:29). Belief means accepting something as true even though you can't exactly get your mind around the what and the how of it. Sometimes knowing the motivation, the why, has to suffice. In this case John the Beloved has given us the motivation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" Jn 3:16.

The next question is would God want such a unique intimacy with us? There is no intimacy greater than that with which we have with our food. Jesus explains in this discourse that he does indeed want this intimacy because it mirrors and participates in the intimacy he has with the Father: "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds

on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." Jn 6:55-58

Lastly, how can such an intimacy come about? We can see that Jesus deliberately uses a shock factor to get the full attention of his audience. The idea of cannibalism and/or drinking blood was grossly distasteful to them. But he refuses to back down or explain it away. It is one thing to believe that Jesus is God. It is quite another to believe that God wants to become our food! This is really not a problem for God for whom all things are possible. It is not the physical body of Jesus as he was when he was living before his resurrection that we receive. It is the resurrected body of Jesus we receive. While still truly physical, resurrected bodies have all kinds of properties and capabilities that we do not have in this phase of life.

John the Beloved does not quote the Genesis story of Melchizedek but certainly he and Jesus' listeners were familiar with the story:

Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words:

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
the creator of heaven and earth;" Gen 14: 18-19.

The use of bread and wine as a priestly offering in which they were then consumed by the participants was not a foreign notion. It was the fact that Jesus claimed that he would become this bread and wine or that bread and wine could become him that was too difficult for them to accept.

In this discourse Jesus was preparing his disciples for both his passion and the Eucharist. The discussion was occasioned by the Passover feast commemorating the eating of the Paschal Lamb and the manna in the desert. There can be little doubt that it happened because it was the turning point in Jesus' ministry. John the Beloved tells us that those who could not handle these ideas, this "hard saying," left Jesus and no longer followed him. The synoptic gospels give us the account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Lord's Supper. They do not unpack the theology of it as John the Beloved does in this discussion after the crossing of the Sea of Galilee. They get distracted as it were in conflating the celebration of the Passover meal with Jesus last supper the day before. John avoids that by telling the story of what happened after the multiplication of the loaves but still gives us the theology of Passover.

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## The Finger of God

They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger Jn 8:6

When the Lord had finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the commandments, the stone tablets inscribed by God's own finger. Ex 31:18

Every good teacher knows that actions speak louder than words and one demonstration is worth a thousand words. Jesus too knew this and there are times in the gospel of John the Beloved when Jesus makes use of this principle. He does so at the supper when he gets up and without a word of explanation starts washing the feet of the disciples Jn.13:5. He does so when without explanation he makes mud with his spittle and anoints the eyes of the blind man then commands him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam Jn. 9:7. He also uses this method of teaching when he knows that nothing he can say will allay the prejudice and emotional demands of the men who have placed a woman caught in adultery before him.

How did this predicament come about? To get the whole picture we have to take into account the setting. Chapters 7 and 8 of the gospel of John the beloved are the account of what happened when Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was the greatest feast of the Jewish year. Devout and able-bodied Jews were required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the celebration. The streets overflowed with crowds. Most homes had at least one or two lodgers sometimes more. The Pharisees scrutinized everyone and everything with constant spying. John the Beloved tells us that Jesus did not go with his friends and relatives. He waited until the feast was half over then went in secret. Apparently he camped out on the Mount of Olives as did many pilgrims who came for the celebration. But as soon as he went to the temple, the Pharisees sought him out to begin arguing. They still contended that he did not observe the law of Moses because he had healed the cripple on the Sabbath. The arguments went nowhere so the Pharisees decided to send temple guards to arrest him. The guards were so impressed they came back empty-handed. The guards answered, "Never before has anyone spoken like this one." Jn.7:46. At night fall they were still arguing about him. Jesus went to the Mt. of Olives to sleep.

Overnight some of the Pharisees concocted a new plan to discredit and arrest Jesus. They were most likely aware of a woman who had a lodger for the holiday who was not her husband. People then as now often take advantage of religious festivals to take a vacation and sometimes even to see a secret lover.

At daybreak as soon as they know Jesus has returned to the Temple, the Pharisees burst into the house and grab the woman out of bed to drag her off to the temple. If Jesus refuses to stone her, he is denying the Law of Moses, if he condones the stoning he is crossing the Roman authorities who did not allow the Jews to sentence anyone to death. Either way they think they have him. The young John the Beloved was most likely with Jesus as a constant companion while he was in Jerusalem. He witnessed the whole scene with the woman unfold.

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area,

and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. Jn 8:2-6

This scene is set against the background of the arguments of the day before about Moses and Moses' importance for the Jewish people. When Pharaoh was stubborn and obstinate about letting the people leave Egypt, Moses did various signs but even the signs did not faze Pharaoh. "... the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' Yet, Pharaoh remained obstinate and would not listen to them, just as the Lord had foretold" Ex. 8:15. Jesus had told the Pharisees that if they did not believe his words, they had the signs he did as proof. Luke put it very clearly and even mentions the "finger of God:" "But if it is by the finger of God that (I) drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" Lk. 11:20. As he writes on the ground Jesus is using his finger to compare their hardness of heart to Pharaoh's. But the imagery does not end there. John the Beloved uses the same phrase about Jesus writing with his finger as is used in Exodus about the finger of God writing the law. His actions are saying "I am the one who wrote the law! What is more, I am rewriting it. Judge yourselves first!"

But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground Jn 8:78.

There has been speculation about what Jesus wrote on the ground. Was he writing the sins of the individual men in the circle? Perhaps he was writing the Hebrew letters for the Decalogue? And as he did so perhaps they remembered the way he had castigated them for failing to keep the law themselves:

They tie up heavy burdens (hard to carry) and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. Mt 23:4

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.' Mt 23:16

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. Mt 23:23

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Mt 23:25

The Pharisees all leave one by one with the oldest going first. Jesus is left alone with the woman and he does not condemn her. The image of Jesus we have here is in accord with the image Matthew gives us when he quotes Jesus as saying: "Judge not and you will not be judged" Mt 7:1,2. This story is set within the context of the feast of Booths (Tabernacles) in which there is fierce discussion of Jesus' identity. We should not pass over or try to relocate this story with its extremely poignant lesson taught by actions rather than words. It points to Jesus' identity as the Finger of God.

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## Living Water

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." Jn 4:10

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Jn 7:37-39

John the Beloved offers us a plethora of "I AM" sayings of Jesus: I AM the Light of the World, I AM Living Bread, I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life, but Jesus never says "I AM Living Water." Rather Jesus says to the Samaritan woman "I will give you living water," and at the feast of Booths: "I will make living water flow from within you." John the Beloved had a profound experience of the Spirit himself beginning with the night on the lake. He experienced the power of the Creator in the storm. He experienced the Incarnate Word/Light of the World as Jesus who came walking on the water toward the boat. He experienced the presence/power of the Spirit in Jesus walking on the water--that Spirit which in Genesis had hovered over the water. This same Spirit inundated John the Beloved, washed over his mind and spirit even as the waves washed over the boat. John the Beloved had his own baptism of water and Spirit, as it were, that night on the lake. He was not immersed in water except by the waves, but he was immersed in the Persons of the Trinity. At the same time he experienced a remarkable transformation—a new grasp on life. His life was given a new meaning. Let's look at some of the stories about water that helped give him that meaning.

### Genesis

John the Beloved has a great affinity for the creation stories in Genesis. We read about the third day:

Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of the water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Gen 1:9-10

The dry land, "the earth", that appeared for John the Beloved after the storm was the shore: "They wanted to take him into the boat, but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading" Jn. 6:21. The shore he had arrived at was the conviction of Jesus' identity as Word of God and One in full identity with the Creator and the Spirit. You could say that John the Beloved was born again that night out of the womb of darkness and water onto the land, the earth, of understanding.



All the places John the Beloved tells stories about Jesus and “living water” are associated with a far deeper meaning than simply being cleansed by running water. In his version of the Baptism story, John the Beloved does not offer any identification of John the Baptist with Elijah and the notions of repentance and cleansing of sin. Jesus goes into the water to renew his Jewish covenant, obedience to the God of Israel and to join John’s new religious movement. Jesus is then anointed by the Father with the Spirit. Water and baptism in John the Beloved’s mind are associated with life in the Spirit. Water does many things for us. Washing is the first that comes to mind physically. Spiritually getting rid of sin is the first thing that comes to mind, but there is so much more. Water literally renews our life every day. All our metabolic processes depend upon water. Water gives us life over and over again every day. That life is mostly unseen, interior in our bodies. But it is more important than external washing with water. John the Beloved compares belief in Jesus, receiving the Spirit with this life-giving function of physical water.

### **Cana**

John the Beloved was in the wedding party and witnessed first-hand the transformation of water into wine in Jesus’ first sign. None of the other evangelists mention this event but again, for the young disciple, it has tremendous significance. The water of Judaism symbolized by the seven stone jars used for Jewish purification rites was transformed into the wine of the New Covenant, the wine of the Spirit as Jesus’ begins his public ministry.

### **Nicodemus**

Nicodemus, the man of the shadows, comes to Jesus at night and Jesus is very straightforward with him: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” Jn 3:5. Water alone is not enough, it must be water embraced because of belief in Jesus which brings Jesus’ Spirit into our lives re-creating us as it were.

### **Woman at the Well**

John the Beloved went with Jesus and his disciples when he left Judea to return to Galilee after a time of teaching and baptizing. Jesus deliberately chose to go through Samaria. The story John the Beloved tells has all the marks of an eyewitness. It is quite possible that when they stopped at Sychar the young disciple stayed with Jesus while the older men went off to get food. He may have been like “a fly on the wall” sitting on the ground in the shade of a wall near the well but not beside Jesus when the Samaritan woman came to get water. The scene was loaded with symbolism for John the Beloved. This was the well (or at least near the one) where Jacob had moved the stone to get water for Rachel’s sheep and then kissed her. Jesus’ visit here was an embrace of these people --a kind of kiss of acceptance. In exchange for the drink from the cistern, Jesus offers the woman living water. John the Beloved does not give her a name because she is a symbol of all Samaritans. In his discourse with her Jesus ends by saying “I AM he (Messiah).” This was a term very significant to the Samaritans because rather than David, they clung to a spiritual heritage from Moses to whom God had revealed the Divine Self as “I AM.”

There is a movement in the conversation from physical water to the effects of “living water”—the renewal of spiritual life, of worship. Her life is transformed, renewed. She is accepted as a woman, as a Samaritan and as a sinner.

### Siloam

Jesus offered the man by the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem the equivalent of living water, healing water, he had lain by the pool for years unable to get into the water when it was “stirred up” with what they believed to be spiritual power.

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk" Jn 5:7-8.

But this man was not really interested in “living water.” Instead of gratitude for being healed, he had a greater interest in defending himself against the Pharisees who told him he was breaking the law by carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Gratitude which shows a lack of entitlement are necessary if the Spirit is to work in us.

### Festival of Booths

On the last day of the Feast of Booths during the remarkable water ceremony water was taken from the pool of Siloam in solemn procession and poured on the altar in the temple. John the Beloved tells us that it is in this setting that Jesus made his proclamation about being the source of living water.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Jn 7:37-39

This description of what happens to a believer is a description of what happened to John the Beloved himself. It is the closest thing to a self-portrait that he gives us along with the description of resting on Jesus' breast. This is more than can be said of the other evangelists of whom we know almost nothing despite the fact that Luke sometimes wrote in the first person in Acts. In this passage John the Beloved has in mind the verses in Gen 2 which speak about the springs of water welling up from within the belly of the earth, starting a new creation. He has Jesus say: "Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him (literally from within his belly, invoking the image in Gen 2).'"

This was John the Beloved's own experience. This river flowing within him gave him the insight of how God's Word could and did become incarnate, of how everything else was created in and through this incarnate Word: "All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be" Jn 1:3. This river of the Spirit was a wonderful source

of insights throughout his lifetime and we have the full fruits of it in his gospel of with all his wonderful "I AM" statements. The wise person in Sirach provides a similar image of wisdom:

For deeper than the sea are her (Wisdom) thoughts;  
her counsels, than the great abyss.

Now I, like a rivulet from her stream,  
channeling the waters into a garden,

Said to myself, "I will water my plants,  
my flower bed I will drench";

And suddenly this rivulet of mine became a river,  
then this stream of mine, a sea.

Thus do I send my teachings forth shining like the dawn,  
to become known afar off.

Thus do I pour out instruction like prophecy  
and bestow it on generations to come Sirach 24: 27-31.

This image of the author as having a little welling up, "a rivulet," of the sea of Wisdom within himself which becomes a spring, a stream, a river, a sea of its own is like the movement of the Spirit within John the Beloved finally giving us his gospel.

Great themes in John the Beloved's gospel always have a creation connection. So to for Living Water: "but a stream was welling up out of the earth (literally the belly of the earth) and was watering all the surface of the ground..."Gen 2:6. The next act of creation in Gen 2:7 is that God forms man out of the ground which the water has softened into clay. John the Beloved sees the same scenario in the new creation. This living water welling up out of the belly of the earth is like the living water flowing as a stream from within the ground of the believer who is softened and shaped by God, the divine Potter (Is 64:7). From this newly formed creature living water continues and flows out to others like the rivers of creation.

It helps to remember John the Beloved's "sense of place" as it is known in Celtic spirituality. Consider the landscape of the bible. The Holy Land as also the areas of present Iran and Iraq (where the first Eden supposedly was) is arid. It is desert terrain for the most part except where streams of water flow creating rivers of life. It is very much like the southwestern United States. In this situation we can understand how living water, running water, is the source of renewed creation, of new life. When you view the horizon in these desert places it is sometimes possible to see the image of a human navel (belly) in the naked, sand-colored curvature. The scripture John the Beloved is referring to in this quote is the water passage of Gen 2:6. Creation was upper most in John the Beloved's mind when water was celebrated as it was at the festival of Booths (Tabernacles). In Western thought the heart is the center of intuition and emotion but in Eastern thought which includes the Bible, the center of intuition and emotion is the gut or navel. The "inmost being" of the psalmist is his gut or belly (Ps 51; 139). John the Beloved wrote in Greek, a western language, but his concepts remain profoundly Hebraic/Eastern.

The scripture John the Beloved refers to is the water passage of Gen 2:6. Living (moving) water has plentiful oxygen and it gives off negative ions into the atmosphere creating sensations of pleasantness for our minds and bodies. The rivers of living water the Spirit unleashes within us are rivers of sweetness, of confidence, of inspiration, of consolation, of refreshment and of power. In this experience we are reborn, reshaped. This is what it means to be born again of water and the Spirit Jn 3:5.

### Washing of the Feet

During the supper the night Jesus was arrested he took water and washed the disciples' feet. Jesus did not explain his action ahead of time. This is typical of the story telling of John the Beloved who is the only one to give us this story. He tells it because he saw in it multiple layers of meaning. First it was an act of love and farewell for Jesus' own; it was a correction of their interest in who was most important; it was their purification rite before the celebration of the dedication of the new Temple, Jesus' body.

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. Jn 13:1-5

### Blood and Water

John the Beloved mentions water one last time in his gospel and for him it was the most significant of all:

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may (come to) believe. Jn 19:33-35.

For the Beloved, the blood from Jesus side is symbolic of the blood/wine of the Eucharist and the water is symbolic of the waters of baptism. We are washed in the person of Jesus as we are immersed in the waters of baptism. We pledge then to live in imitation of him and his self-sacrifice. We are fed with the wine of the Eucharist. And as a result of that, from within us can flow the river of the Spirit as Living Water which like the river welling up in the Genesis story, makes us into a new creation.

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## The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles)

After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers\* said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.” For his brothers did not believe in him. So Jesus said to them, “My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up\* to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled.” After he had said this, he stayed on in Galilee. But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but [as it were] in secret Jn 7:10

The closest equivalent in American Culture to the Jewish Feast of Booths or Tabernacles is Thanksgiving. Our Thanksgiving only covers one day with Friday and the weekend providing a kind of extended period to relish the celebration. The Jewish festival lasts for eight days the first two days and the last two being especially festive. Originally it was a feast celebrating the time they spent in tents in the desert before the settling of the Holy Land. For this festival they build little booths or “tabernacles” outside and decorate them. After the settlement of the holy land this became a thanksgiving festival at the time of the autumn harvest. The booths or lean-to shelters came to represent not just the time in the desert but also the little shelters the workers stay in while bringing in the harvest. This feast is the most joyous of the Jewish festivals. In Jesus’ time there were two special ceremonies which highlighted the celebration. At the beginning huge candelabras with bowls of oil were set on fire in the Court of Women. They lit up the whole Temple and could be seen for miles. The other ceremony was one with water and wine at the end of the celebration. Now days to celebrate the people still make outdoor huts or lean-to’s and decorated them with festive banners and hangings. In Jesus’ time this was one of the three pilgrimage feasts requiring Jewish men to come to Jerusalem. There were big crowds in the city for the festivities.

A large section of John the Beloved’s gospel—chapters seven and eight—are devoted to this festival. Because his home was in Jerusalem he was very familiar with the Temple liturgies and in these chapters John the Beloved has chosen to weave into Jesus’ discussions with the Pharisees many concepts related to Jesus’ origin. This was their turf and they resented Jesus even more when he spoke there. Jesus came to the festival late when it was half over and then he chose to spend the nights camping out on the Mount of Olives as many pilgrims for the festival did. This provided him with some degree of privacy from the prying and spying of the Pharisees. John the Beloved tells us that he did not want to go to Judea because they were seeking to kill him. And at the end of the story Jesus leaves the Temple and city again as they take up rocks to stone him to death.

There is a modern teaching technique used to help capture key concepts in a text. It is done by creating a visual of the main words so that when reading/recalling the text you can be alert to them and get the most of what has been said. Some of the key words/concepts John the Beloved presents in association with the Feast of Booths are:



If we regard each of these words as one of the little “tabernacles” or booths at the Festival we can make our way to each one like the visitors making the rounds of the booths of family and friends during this thanksgiving festival. In doing so we can come to see why Jesus’ origin was for John the Beloved the thing that deserved our greatest gratitude.

## Crowds

The first booth we come to in our jaunt through the “tabernacles” created by this feast is “crowds.” It is decorated with banners that have a different color on each side and are constantly blowing in the wind and changing sides like the crowds whose attitudes toward Jesus in constantly changing.

And there was considerable murmuring about him in the crowds. Some said, "He is a good man," (while) others said, "No; on the contrary, he misleads the crowd" Jn 7:12.

But many of the crowd began to believe in him, and said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring about him to this effect, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent guards to arrest him. Jn 7: 31-32

We can imagine a city bursting with visiting throngs of people from all over the country and even from other countries. Jesus was the hot topic. Everyone had an opinion about him or a question about who he was. The Pharisees had two major concerns. First they wanted to remain in the spotlight as the leaders, the knowledgeable ones in all things concerning God and the Law. Second was crowd control. They wanted to keep people from being influenced by Jesus. They felt threatened by him.

Some in the crowd who heard these words said, "This is truly the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Messiah." But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him." Jn 7:40-44

The Pharisees determined that it was their function to put things right, they are the knowledgeable ones. "But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed" Jn. 7:49. So they continue to try and find ways to discredit him and even arrest him.

## Teacher

The next booth we come to is that of "Teacher." This booth is decorated with many scrolls of scripture. They are laid out tastefully and a few are open to special passages in the writings of the prophets.

In his behavior Jesus is posing as a Rabbi, as one who has the right to teach others.

The Jews were amazed and said, "How does he know scripture without having studied?" Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me" Jn 7:15-16.

Like any Jewish boy of the time Jesus would have learned to read and write Hebrew by being exposed to the Pentateuch or Law. In addition he would have been exposed to the other writings such as the Prophets and some of the Wisdom books. When John the Beloved says he had not studied, he is referring to the fact that Jesus had not attended any of the schools of the Rabbis in Jerusalem which they considered a prerequisite for teaching the crowds. He was acting outside the norm and that was intolerable to them.

In modern terms Jesus might have said to them "You know the law, but I know its author!" Actually a similar claim can be made for John the Beloved. He was not one of the twelve. He was a mere "lad" whereas the Twelve were grown, mature men. Decades later his writing was accepted by officials because they confused him with one of the Twelve. But John stands on another kind of authority—the authority of personal intimacy. Others may repeat the stories they heard and do different takes on the meaning of those stories, but John the Beloved was there. He rested his head on Jesus' chest. His authority is the authority of intimacy. He was most likely present with Jesus every minute during the festival and heard these arguments for himself.

## Possessed

Moving around the circle of booths, we come to "possessed." Or more accurately "you have a demon." The Booth is quite distasteful with ugly, ghoulish masks. "The crowd answered, 'You are possessed! Who is trying to kill you?'" Jn 7:20.

In the culture of the time persons who were mentally ill or who could do unusual feats were considered to have a "spirit" inside them. For Jesus this is the height of insult. His words and works make perfect sense and demonstrate the goodness of God. Even



the guards sent to arrest him recognize this: “The guards answered, ‘Never before has anyone spoken like this one’” Jn 7:46. Sometimes when we accuse someone else of being “possessed” it is ourselves who are possessed by such bias or prejudice that we cannot even follow sound reasoning.

Toward the end of the arguments they will accentuate this accusation by also calling him a “Samaritan.” Which would be the equivalent of saying; “You are a worthless, half-breed who practices magic under the influence of the devil.”

## Messiah and Prophet

This booth is decorated with olive branches and on the table is a ram’s horn filled with olive oil.

The Messiah was one who would be “anointed” as David was anointed. The word Messiah means “anointed one.” The prophets, however, were not anointed for their roles. Their commissioning usually came through some deep personal experience of God. Isaiah and Jeremiah both give us an account of their call to be prophets (Isa 6:1; Jer. 1) “The” prophet who was expected to come was one foretold by Moses: “A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen” Deut 18:15.

For John the Beloved Jesus was the Messiah. He received his anointing when he was in the river Jordan with John the Baptist. There the Father anointed him with the Spirit for his ministry. While Luke would devote his gospel to showing the prophetic aspects of Jesus’ ministry, John the Beloved does not give this a great deal of attention. He does mention it after the multiplication of loaves: “When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world” Jn. 6:14.

And during the Feast of Booths there was quite a bit of discussion about Jesus as the Prophet and or Messiah:

And look, he is speaking openly and they say nothing to him.  
Could the authorities have realized that he is the Messiah? But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from” Jn 7:26-27.

Some in the crowd who heard these words said, “This is truly the Prophet” Jn 7:40.

For John the Beloved, Jesus is much more than the prophet Moses foretold, Jesus is greater than Moses or any of the prophets.

## Sent

The names of the great prophets decorate this booth beginning with Samuel and ending with John the Baptist all of whom were “sent.” This is a favorite word of John the Beloved. “ So Jesus said, ‘I will be with you only a little while longer, and then I will go to the one who sent me’” Jn 7:33. In the synoptic gospels various beings are sent: Angels, Prophets.

And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news" Lk 1:19

Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Lk 4:25-26

In the gospel of Luke Jesus applies the words of the prophet Isaiah to himself:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free, Lk 4:19.

In all three synoptic gospels we find statements similar to Jesus' statement in Luke: "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" Lk. 10:16. John the Beloved speaks of the Baptist as one sent on a special mission not just to preach, but to identify the one who would baptize with the Spirit. However, in the statements Jesus so often repeats in the Gospel of John the Beloved there is another layer of meaning and his listeners sense this which is why their rejection is all the more vehement. "I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me" Jn. 7:29. The "from him" means not only from but "one with." It is as if Jesus is saying "I AM sent." John the Beloved is having Jesus say "I am not just another one of the many sent by God to speak words to you. I AM that word."

## Moses

This booth is decorated with images associated with Moses, a cradle of reeds, a shepherd's crook, manna, the tablets of the Law and the five scrolls of the Torah. At the end of this feast they also celebrated ending the reading of the Torah for that year. A portion is read each Sabbath and this festival is the end of the cycle which will begin all over again.

On a previous visit to Jerusalem, Jesus had healed the cripple beside the pool of Siloam. It was a Sabbath and the Pharisees were enraged that Jesus cured someone on a Sabbath and then told him to take up his mat and walk (thus in their opinion breaking the Law of Moses himself and telling someone else to do so likewise). Their goal at this festival if Jesus showed up was to prove that he did not keep the Law of Moses. Jesus points out that they themselves only keep the law in the way they choose to interpret it:

Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the

law Jn 7:19

If a man can receive circumcision on a sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole person well on a Sabbath. Jn 7:23

When the guards do not arrest Jesus, the Pharisees' determination grows to find a way to prove to the people that in their opinion Jesus does not keep the Law of Moses.

## Spirit

This lovely booth dedicated to the Spirit would have the symbols of the Spirit on display—long streamers for the waves of wind and water.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the Spirit is like wind—blowing where it will:

Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit Jn 4:5-8.

During the celebration of water on the last day of this thanksgiving festival Jesus speaks of the Spirit and water.

## Living Water

Right next to the Spirit booth is that of "Living Water", being dedicated to water it would, of course, have a representation of Gen 2:6: "but a stream was welling up out of the earth and was watering all the surface of the ground." This is a prefigurement of the "rivers of water coming from within the believer, coming from within John the Beloved welling up and producing a new creation.

It was at this feast on the last and greatest day of the celebration John the Beloved tells us that Jesus made this proclamation about the Spirit (water) coming from within the believer.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Jn 7:37

A special ceremony was held that day in the Temple in which water taken from the pool of Siloam was carried in procession along with wine. Both were placed on the altar in

the Temple. Jesus and John the Beloved see that water and wine as being replaced for Christians by the experience of Baptism and Eucharist.

## Finger of God

Over this booth is big display of the Hebrew characters for the words “Finger of God.” This booth is next to the booth of Moses since it was the attendants of Pharaoh who use this term in reference to how Moses was working signs to prove God wanted his people set free: “... the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” Yet Pharaoh remained obstinate and would not listen to them, just as the Lord had foretold” Ex 8:15. Jesus experiences the same obstinate resistance regarding his cure of a cripple.

## Light of the World

Inside this booth are four large brass basins of oil representing the ones that were lighted in the temple on the first day of the festival. People had just witnessed the display of light from the bowls of fire lit in the Temple. Jesus makes use of this to identify himself as the light of the world: “Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” Jn. 8:12. This is another of John the Beloved’s I AM sayings and he identifies Jesus as the light in Genesis 1: “Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light” Gen 1:3. Jesus was the Word God spoke which became light.

The Pharisees immediately accused him of bearing witness to himself which would make his witness worthless. But Jesus responds that there are two who bear witness--himself and the Father.

## Father

When we arrive at this booth we find a very large “tabernacle” beautifully decorated. There are grape vines strung over the top for the one who planted the vine of Israel. There are lovely clay pots set out on the little table in honor of the father who is the potter.

Yet, O Lord, you are our father;  
we are the clay and you the potter:  
we are all the work of your hands. Isa 64:7

The use of the title of “Father” for God was not unknown in the Hebrew scriptures:

They departed in tears,  
but I will console them and guide them;  
I will lead them to brooks of water,  
on a level road, so that none shall stumble.  
For I am a father to Israel,  
Ephraim is my first-born Jer 31:9.

However, “Father” is used only fourteen times in the Hebrew Scriptures where as it is used in the New Testament frequently. Both Matthew and Luke tell the story of

how Jesus taught the disciples to pray to God as Father (Mt. 6; Lk.11). In the Gospel of John the Beloved it is used more than a hundred times. It is not used to indicate that God is only "Father" or that God is male. It is used to demonstrate close relationship. If someone is called "Father" then there must be a child and Jesus claims to be the Only Son of this Father in a way completely different than Israel is understood to be a son of God.

There are none of Jesus' beautiful parables in the gospel of John the Beloved and the Kingdom of God is scarcely mentioned but over and over again Jesus refers to the close relationship between himself and the Father and even further how we are destined to be drawn into that relationship. No one can come into this relatedness unless "the father draw him" Jn 6:44. This invitation to embrace the relatedness of the Persons of the Trinity is the hallmark, the major feature of the Gospel of John the Beloved.

## I AM

This booth is the largest of all standing in the center and all the others have something of its construction in them. The broad back wall is decorated with a large seascape showing a small boat being tossed about by the waves. On each wave is an inscription:

But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke with them, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!" Mk 6:49-50.

During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once (Jesus) spoke to them, "Take courage, I AM do not be afraid." Mt 14:25-27

The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. But he said to them, "I AM" Jn 6:18-20

He alone stretches out the heavens  
and treads upon the crests of the sea Job 9:8.

God replied, "I am who AM." Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you Ex 3:14.

I AM, I the LORD;  
there is no savior but me Isa. 43:11

The side walls of this booth have hanging streamers each with a different "I AM" saying: I AM the Light of the World; I AM the Good Shepherd; I AM the Son of God Jn

10:36; I AM the Vine; I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life; I AM the gate Jn 10:7; I AM lifted up; I AM Living Bread; I AM Logos.

After the experience of seeing Jesus walking on the water, Mark comments that the disciples had not understood the comparison of multiplying loaves vs. walking on water. (Mk 6:42). There was, however, one disciple who understood but held his peace being considered too young to explain what he might think and expect it to be accepted. Perhaps because he was so young, his mind was more open. Decades later, he does set it all out and we are amazed at its richness. John the Beloved seized upon this phrase which Jesus used that night on the sea and he has Jesus repeating it over and over in case we, like the disciples, don't understand. Apparently Mark (or his sources) had picked up on the same thing as John the Beloved. There was too much focus on wanting Jesus to be a bread king—a messiah who would simply give them physical food. Everyone who came to be a true believer had to move to the recognition that Jesus was God and was offering a relationship.

For John the Beloved, the grief of the situation is what people do to themselves by rejecting Jesus: "That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins" Jn 8:24. All of the dialog over the feast of the Booths or Tabernacles has at its root the identity of Jesus. He self-identifies as the one the Father has sent—God's only Son, and the one who will send the Spirit. John the Beloved wants us to recognize this for the freedom and eternal joy it brings. For John the Beloved as for Isaiah, there is no salvation except in the I AM.

## Free

Fig branches and the sculpture of a snake decorate this booth. The fig branches represent the teaching of the Pharisees who were known to teach under a fig tree in Bethpage. The snake represents the tempter in the Garden of Eden.

For a brief moment it seems that in the crowd Jesus was having this intense debate with at the Feast of Booths some were coming around to his way of thinking:

Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him. Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free Jn 8:30-32

But then the dialog turns sour again like those double-sided banners twisting in the wind. They take offense because he implies that they are not free.

They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free?'" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. Jn 8:3-34

Actually the sons of Abraham had been slaves in Egypt and were captives when they were carried off to Babylon for the exile. Perhaps they are referring to the fact that under the Roman occupation they can carry on their own commerce and worship. But Rome did require taxes and keep track of some of the population as archeological

evidence indicates. The craftsmen among them had to report for censuses. Rome wanted to know who and where they were for building projects. This is probably why Joseph had to register in Bethlehem. Jesus' antagonists at the feast are thinking of freedom in political terms but Jesus has something else in mind—the slavery of sin. The issue of sin was large for John the Beloved because for him sin was not a failure to observe the prescriptions of the Pharisees such as taking too many steps on the Sabbath or eating with unwashed hands. Sin for John the Beloved is being out of relationship with Jesus and the Father. Since belief is the doorway to that relationship he regards disbelief or the unwillingness to examine what Jesus says as sin:

Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we say, "We are without sin," we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. 1 Jn 1:5-9

To walk “in the light” is to believe in Jesus and follow his example. For John the Beloved this is a black and white issue—either you believe or you do not. Jesus recognizes that he is up against arrogant prejudice with no willingness to examine the possible claim to truth:

I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father. They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. Jn 8:37-39

## Truth/ אֱמֶת

This booth has the Hebrew word for Truth, (EMET) in large letters across the back of the booth; that is אֱמֶת in the midst of scenes from the story of creation. These three letters are the letters that begin each of the last three Hebrew words of the creation account in Genesis 2:3. This makes them very sacred to John the Beloved with his love of the creation stories. To live in truth was to carry on the work of creation, the work of the Father which Jesus came to do. To be truthful was to have the “seal of God” a phrase used by Jewish scholars, on your personhood. John tells us that Jesus had that seal: "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal" Jn 6:27. From the prolog to the trial before Pilate John the Beloved raises the issue of Jesus as Truth. At the Feast of Booths this becomes a key part of the argument:

But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the

truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this (kill a messenger of truth). You are doing the works of your father!" (So) they said to him, "We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me. You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? Jn 8:40-46

Jesus calls them sons of the devil in that they seek to kill him, the Truth. He goes on to say that if he denied who he is, that would make him a liar.

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word Jn 8:45.

## Abraham

The last booth is the one called "Abraham." It is large and elegant. Inside it are decorations recalling Abraham's special encounters with God: a map of the Promised Land (Gen. 12:1) under a star-filled sky (Gen. 15:5), a table and three chairs (Gen. 18), and the horns of a ram (Gen 22:13).

When we come to this booth we have arrived at the heart and soul of Judaism--its origins from the spirituality and the physical body of Abraham. Judaism begins with Abraham's willingness to answer God's call and believe in God's word.

He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist. He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "Thus shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body as (already) dead (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the dead womb of Sarah. He did not doubt God's promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to do. That is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." Rom 4:17-22

During the argument Jesus had with the Jewish leaders and some in the crowds on the Feast of Booths, Jesus exhorts them to do the works of their father, Abraham--that is have faith like Abraham. Abraham believed despite the evidence to the contrary



and he was justified. Jesus is asking the crowd to believe in him despite the fact that they can physically see only his human origins. But they refuse.

They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" (So) they said to him, "We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and

am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word Jn 8:39-43.

The argument goes back and forth until it culminates in Jesus dramatic statement about being the IAM-Logos before Abraham came to be: "Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be (creation), I AM (Logos)" Jn. 8:58. In this statement John is going back to the prolog of the gospel where he talks about creation:

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be Jn 1:1-3

To get the full sense of what Jesus said to the crowds we have to read it something like this: "As the *Word* of God, I AM God who existed before anything *came to be*. *Everything came to be* through me including Abraham." This is the strongest of Jesus' I AM statements and one in which he also self-identifies as the Word (Logos). In a certain sense all of the dialogs of the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) are about Jesus' origin and here he makes the strongest statement of all.

The Feast of Booths is the Jewish thanksgiving festival, an immediate thanksgiving for the current year's harvest and a broader thanksgiving for all that makes up their heritage—Abraham living in a tent wandering the Holy Land, the escapees from Egypt living in tents in the desert when they receive the Decalogue, the entire Torah, the families and workers living in lean-to shelters for the harvest work. It is a kind of summary of who they are. John the Beloved has made use of this celebration of summaries to create a summary of Jesus' identity based upon the arguments he overheard between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and people in the crowds during the celebration. We can see a similar summary of Catholic Christianity in the scenes which make up the decades of the Rosary. By visiting each scene we can get an over-all picture of the Christian faith. By visiting the word booths of Jesus' conversation we gain an overview of Jesus' identity through the writing of John the Beloved.

John the Beloved presents Jesus as the very truth of God from Genesis doing the work of God—creation. He is setting humankind free of sin; as the great I AM of Exodus.

Jesus is the Logos—Word of God who is equal with God. He is the Finger of God who wrote the Law, who is greater than Moses. He has existed from before anything else that came into being. He lives in intimate communing with the Father. He is the Messiah and “the” prophet. He is the greatest of the teachers in Israel. He is the source of the Spirit who will well up within those who believe in him like the springs welling up in Genesis chapter two to water the earth. He is the light of the world dispelling all darkness.

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## I AM the Good Shepherd

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep Jn 10:14.

Then he (Andrew) brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter) Jn 1:42

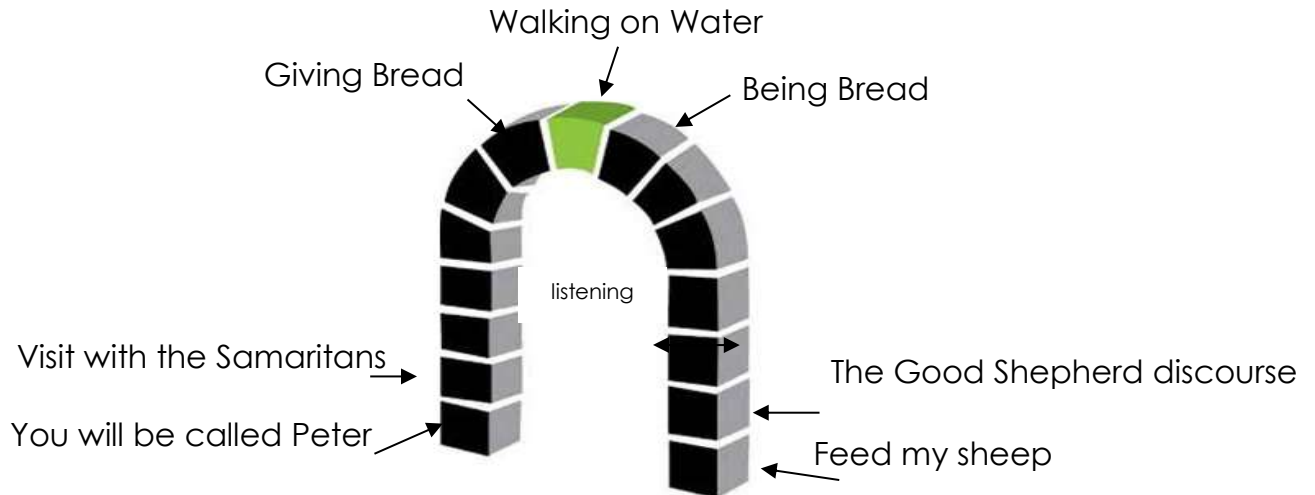
He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, "Feed my sheep Jn 21:17

Nowhere is the theological and literary genius of John the Beloved more in evidence than in the portion of his gospel devoted to the Good Shepherd. This is due to the positioning of the text, the image itself and the subtle references embedded in it.

The text is positioned to serve as a summation of the public ministry of Jesus, the last teaching he does at the last major Jewish festival before the Passover when Jesus will be arrested and put to death. In the great chiasm of the whole gospel as Peter Ellis shows in his diagram, it is positioned as the ending counterpart to a story at the beginning of the gospel. That is the story of Jesus' stay with the Samaritans during his missionary journey back to Galilee from Judea, -- a journey on which John the Beloved accompanied the group. The spirituality of the gospel is found in the relatedness, the tension, between these two sides of John the Beloved's arch. The Samaritans listened. They listened to the woman who introduced Jesus. They listened to Jesus. They invited him to stay with them which he did for a full two days interrupting his journey.

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done." When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." Jn 4:39-41.

These men were shepherds who lived where Jacob had lived and drank from the well where he watered Rachael's sheep. The key is that they listened.



In the Good Shepherd discourse Jesus says that his sheep “listen to his voice.”

The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers Jn 10:3-5

To the mind of John the Beloved the shepherds of Samaria, the outcasts, the marginalized and despised, are the sheep that listen. While all during the Jesus’ ministry to the Jews, they refused to listen:

“Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word” Jn 8:43.

Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God Jn 8:47

He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Jn 9:27

“Then many of his disciples who were listening said, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’” Jn 6:60

All who came (before me) are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them Jn 10:8

Many of them said, "He is possessed and out of his mind; why listen to him? Jn 10:20.

In a certain sense the story of the gospel can be summarized by saying that those who should have did not listen while those who were despised did listen. Likewise Jesus' ministry can be summed up in the activities of a shepherd: he fed his own, he gave them to drink, he led them to new pastures, he cured them, he protected them and he will leave them safely in the sheepfold when he goes to his death alone. That is, all except for one lamb who insisted on staying with him right to the bitter end.

For John the Beloved this segment of the gospel also serves as his form of a genealogy. Matthew gives his genealogy at Jesus' birth. Luke chose to give his at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in keeping with the pattern of the prophets' identification when they begin their mission. John the Beloved chooses not a physical genealogy but a symbolic and mystical one and it comes in the image of the shepherd--the most beloved image of God in the Hebrew testament. Adam was a "shepherd" to the other animals giving each a name, Abraham was a shepherd, Jacob was a master shepherd who lived for a time in the area of Samaria, Moses was a shepherd. David was a shepherd. Amos was a shepherd. John the Beloved is showing that Jesus was "the" Shepherd of Israel in the line of all these others and greater than them as God.

There is no image of God which is more prevalent in the Hebrew Scriptures than that of Shepherd. God is even addressed as Shepherd: "O Shepherd of Israel, listen, guide of the flock of Joseph Ps 80:2. The psalm (poem/song) about God as shepherd is one of the most beautiful passages of the Hebrew Testament:

The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures you let me graze;  
to safe waters you lead me;

you restore my strength.  
You guide me along the right path  
for the sake of your name.

Even when I walk through a dark valley,  
I fear no harm for you are at my side;  
your rod and staff give me courage.

You set a table before me  
as my enemies watch;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

Only goodness and love will pursue me  
all the days of my life;  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
for years to come Ps 23:1-6

But John the Beloved has in mind another prophesy which again, relates to Jesus' identity as God.

I will save my sheep so that they may no longer be despoiled,

and I will judge between one sheep and another. I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David; he shall pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them, and rid the country of ravenous beasts, that they may dwell securely in the desert and sleep in the forests. (You, my sheep, you are the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God.) Ezk 34:22-25; 31

John the Beloved waits until this point in his gospel to bring forth this image in keeping with his theme of portraying Jesus at the celebration of the great Jewish feast days in Jerusalem. He tells us that it was now winter and the feast of the dedication of the Temple was being celebrated. Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd which is to say, a God-figure and also the promised Messiah according to Ezekiel.

But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them Jn 10:2-5

This scene of the shepherd calling his sheep would have been a familiar one in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus. Sometimes when things are too familiar we do not recognize important lessons they have to teach us. Jesus uses the words "voice" or "calls" in this short passage four times. For John the Beloved, how the Shepherd, Jesus, calls each individual by name is significant. It is a feature of Jesus' personality. The other evangelists tell us the names of the Twelve. But seldom do any of them picture Jesus addressing individuals by name.

In John the Beloved's gospel:

Jesus addresses Simon by name when he first meets him Jn 1:42;

he addresses Lazarus by name when he calls him out of his tomb Jn 11:43;

he addresses Philip by name during the supper on the night he was arrested Jn 14:9;

Jesus addresses Mary by name on the morning of his resurrection Jn 20:16:

Jesus addresses Simon by name at the seashore the morning the risen Jesus fixes breakfast for his disciples Jn 21:17. C

Certainly there were many times when Jesus spoke to "his own" by name but we do not have the stories. In these few we do have what we can see is the special individual relationship he had with each of these persons. This Shepherd knows his sheep and they know him.

In the chiasmic pattern which John the Beloved cherished, he introduces Peter at the beginning of the gospel and again at the end. At the beginning when Jesus first meets Peter who is introduced to him by his brother, Andrew, and by John the Beloved, Jesus gives Peter a special name, one that was unique as it is not found in the Hebrew

Scriptures. This name related to both the character and the role Peter would come to have. Here we have an example of the Good Shepherd calling a sheep by name—a special name he has given this sheep. At the end of the gospel Jesus uses Peter’s formal Jewish name. But in telling the story John the Beloved calls this sheep “Peter” which indicates that the special name Jesus gave him, “Peter” stuck. It was the way the Christian communities referred to him. In this scene Peter is confirmed as a shepherd—one who would shepherd the sheep like a “shepherd formed after the heart of God” (Jer. 3:15) who would care for the sheep out of love. Thus Peter introduced and named in the first chapter and in the last verses of the gospel called to serve out of love becomes the model for all apostles. It is the model of a caring shepherd.

In the Hebrew testament there was a special significance to knowing/giving someone’s name. Adam named all the other animals. And John is writing about a new creation so the new Adam gives Simon, the son of John, a new name for his role in the new creation. In the thought of the Hebrew Testament when giving a name you gave that person or place a unique identity. John the Beloved is conveying the notion that having a special relationship with Christ bestows a special sense of personal identity. For Peter, that identity was being a leader. For John the Beloved it was “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” John the Beloved is indicating that Jesus not only reveals himself to us, he reveals ourselves to us. And this revealing is meant to mirror the knowing the Father and the Son have of each other:

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father" Jn 10:14-18

The other sheep Jesus speaks about are the Samaritans and anyone who is willing to listen to his voice. The first mention of sheep in John’s gospel after the Lamb of God is at Jacob’s well when the woman Jesus met there asks: “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jn 4:12. Willingness to listen to the Shepherd and then follow him are the only requirements for belonging to Jesus’ flock.

Paul, in his theology develops the idea of Jesus as the new Adam. To do so he uses a verse from the second creation story in Genesis and alters it slightly: “So, too, it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being,’ the last Adam a life-giving spirit I Cor. 15:45. John the Beloved does not identify Jesus or have Jesus self-identify as the new Adam, nevertheless, given John the Beloved’s affinity for the creation stories there is a hint in the description of the Good Shepherd calling each sheep by name of Adam giving a name to each of the animals in the second creation story in Genesis. In this sense we could say that Paul and John the Beloved both saw Jesus as the new Adam.

For John the Beloved, however, there is still more. “I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep Jn 10:14-5. John is always aware of the intensity of the relationship between Jesus and the Father and he holds this out as the model for the

relationship between Jesus and his own. To know in the biblical sense is more than just intellectual knowledge. It is a knowledge born of physical and emotional intimacy. At this point in Jesus' ministry he had built strong relationships with his own, he knew them and they as far as they were capable during the time before the outpouring of the Spirit, knew him. John the Beloved tells us it was winter when the festival of the Dedication took place. The next great festival will be Passover—the Passover when the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep, when the Lamb of God will be slain.

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## I AM the Gate

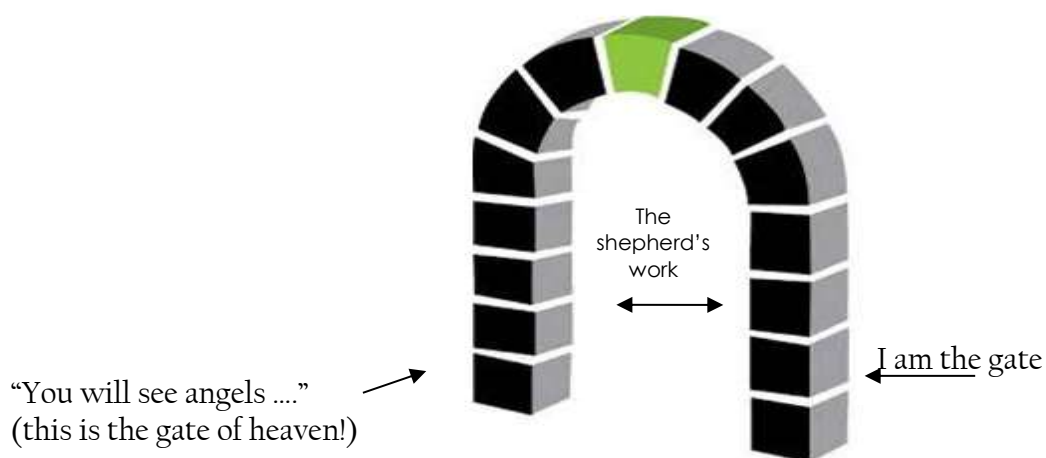
I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture Jn 10:9

They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb Ex 12:7.

In the segment on the Good Shepherd (John 10), John the Beloved is not solely concerned with his theme of Jesus' discourses at the major Jewish festivals. He had still more profound motives for the imagery in this segment of his gospel. When Jesus first speaks to his listeners in this passage he gives the image of the sheep gate/door and mentions it more than once.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" Jn 10:1-2.

Jesus compares himself to the gate or door and the Father to the gatekeeper. But his words were lost on those who heard. They would have understood the sheepfold to be Israel and they saw no need to be led out of where they were physically or mentally. Jesus then moves on to the image of the Good Shepherd. However, there is good cause to take time to consider this image of the gate/door. John the Beloved had strong reasons beyond the discourse at a festival for inserting it into his gospel.



The image of a gate/door figures strongly in two Hebrew Testament passages. In the first Jacob cries out after his dream that the stairway he had seen "...is the gateway to heaven!" Gen 28:17. John the Beloved already applied this image indirectly to Jesus in his first chapter. But he has another image in mind as well: "They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb" Ex 12:7. So Jesus is comparing himself to the Paschal Lamb whose blood on the door frame enables the Israelites to escape death.

Even beyond these links to the Hebrew Testament, John the Beloved has still another purpose in using this image of the gate/door. Its position in his gospel gives us a clue. It has to do with transition—transition from ministry, from "doing signs" to being the great sign of the one lifted up. For John the Beloved this chapter on the Good Shepherd is the closing of Jesus' ministry. In his opening chapter to Jesus' ministry (John 1) the Baptist had introduced Jesus to Andrew and John the Beloved as the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36) that scene took place at the river Jordan and now the Lamb has come full circle returning to the place where he began his ministry, he has reached the time of his sacrifice. Characteristically, John ties together the beginning and the ending: Jesus' ministry ends where it began: "He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained" Jn 10:40. This is part of John the Beloved's tremendous sense of place which we see in other instances as well:

Jesus sees Nathaniel "under the fig tree;" Jn 1:48 (the fig tree turns out to hold special significance)

Jesus went to Samaria and met a woman "Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon" Jn 4:6 (the well holds special significance)

During the Feast of Booths: "Jesus when out to the Mt. of Olives" Jn 8:1 (it is the Mt. of Olives here but will change to the garden)

As regards the Mt. of Olives, he will no longer refer to it as that but rather John the Beloved will tell us "there was a garden" which for him is the Garden of Eden in the new creation Jn 18:1, 26; 19:41. This sense of place is a reverencing of the fact that in some places the veil between our present existence and the spiritual world is so thin as they say in Celtic spirituality, that you can almost see through it. Jacob experienced that in his dream (Gen 28:17). And Jesus promised the same to Nathanael. "And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" Jn 1:51. This conversation with Nathanael made a deep impression on Nathanael's friend, the young John the Beloved, because of its reference to Jacob's experience at Bethel (Gen 28:10-18) and Abraham's experience before that. John the beloved himself had such a revelatory experience on the Sea of Galilee and he could identify with these figures and their experiences.

There is yet a further meaning to the "gate/door" symbol. While Luke gives us the image of the Shepherd with the lamb on his shoulders (Lk 15), John the Beloved is the only evangelist to extensively develop the figure of the Shepherd which was so close to the heart of Israel. He uses it as a summation and a transition. The chapter on the Good Shepherd sums up Jesus' ministry: the Shepherd has cared for his own feeding them, leading them, healing them, teaching them and now the time has come for him to lay down his life for them. In his Gospel John the Beloved guides us through this

transition. Transitions are enormously important in our thought processes. They enable us to make connections and to progress logically to the next concept. They are in fact like doorways. Psychologically we know that going through a door/gate will take us to something new—another room, another pasture, another horizon. So John gives us this gate/door which will be marked with the blood of the Lamb to help us get that signal. For him the death and revitalization of Lazarus is so intimately connected to Jesus own death and resurrection that it is like the prelude to the “book of glory.”

As we pass through this gate/doorway we are leaving the “book of signs” and preparing to enter the “book of glory.” The gate to ministry opened at the end of John the Beloved’s first chapter. Now it closes with the chapter or chiasm of the good Shepherd.

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## I AM the Resurrection

All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life, Jn 1:4

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jn 11:25-6

If we were to use one word to sum up the gospel of John the Beloved, that word would be "Life!" The synoptic gospels are preoccupied with the "Kingdom of God" here and to come. John is preoccupied with "life." We could say more specifically he is preoccupied with a life here and now that has profound meaning with deep relationships which will extend into "eternal" life. In Hebrew the word life is plural—that is, life only exists as something belonging to all of creation as we live it together. John the Beloved recognizes that this life belonging to all of creation came to be in the Word:

All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life,  
Jn 1:4 (prolog)

The night Jesus walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee convinced John the Beloved that Christ was the living Word of God, in complete union with the "I AM" and as such he was both within creation and beyond it. Creation exists within a time/space continuum. Without regard for either the distance between him and the disciples in the boat or the time it would take to cover that distance physically, Jesus came to them in the boat out on the Sea. He is the source of life and was now doing something new—recreating, transforming life for all creation. For John the Beloved this was the day of the new creation. The outstanding feature of the new creation would be the Resurrection. Before creation the Godself, the Trinity, intended for creation to participate in the glory of God. But intellectual creatures—the tempter, the first humans—preferred themselves to God

But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. Gen 3:4-6

Even if these are mythological figures we still have ample proof of the perversion of human nature "We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way" Isa.

53:6. Sin is preferring ourselves, our own knowledge, our own pleasure, our own prestige over God. Far from being angry and vengeful, God had a problem to solve—how to remedy this situation. Having endowed intelligent creatures with free will without which they could not consciously participate in divine glory, EL (Hebrew non-gendered pronoun for God in the Scriptures) would not interfere with their self-determination. EL had foreseen this and there was another answer. Love would make a way:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him Jn 3:16-7.

Love was the basic reason for the incarnation and God would solve this problem of the straying of creation by opening again the way to divine intimacy—glory—with a dramatic demonstration of love and obedience which would both wipe away sin and open again the way to glory. Had there been no sin, the Word would still have become incarnate leading us into divine intimacy. But sin brought death and now the way would lead through death: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:23.

For John the Beloved, life was more than just breathing and moving. It was having the fruits of life: meaning, understanding, intimacy and assurance of eternal existence. In his time there was a great deal of debate as to what was meant by life after death. Many Jews did not (and still do not) believe in life after death. You “live” after death only in your offspring, your accomplishments and the remembrance others have of you. To “die” meant not simply the cessation of life but the loss of offspring and remembrance. Sometimes it is hard to tell which is meant—natural death or the loss of offspring and remembrance or both. When John the Beloved speaks of “having life” he is speaking of having a life now that has profound meaning in Christ and, in addition with this, existence with Christ after death: “Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me” Jn. 6:57. Paul says the same thing in his letter to the Romans:

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection Rom 6:4-5

There is a story on either side of the John’s arch/chiasm in which John the beloved has crafted his gospel which demonstrates Jesus’ power over life. The story of the royal official’s son in Chapter four is on the first side and the story of the raising of Lazarus in chapter eleven is on the other side of the chiasm. Both are pieces about raising the dead. In the first story, Jesus is in Cana and the boy’s father comes to him from Capernaum. The boy is very near death and Jesus from afar restores the boy to health.

The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live," and he and his whole household came to believe.

Now) this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea Jn 4:53.

In the second story, the one on the second side of the arch, Jesus is in Galilee when his friend, Lazarus, who is in Judea becomes very ill.

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him, saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was Jn 11:1-6.

By the time Jesus travels to Judea four days have passed since Lazarus death. In the story of the young boy the child was at death's door. In the Lazarus story, Jesus' friend has been buried for four days. Both stories are miracles but obviously the second story is much more dramatic because of how long Lazarus has been dead. John the Beloved is showing that Jesus has power over life across space (the story of restoring the boy's life from a distance) and time (Lazarus dead for days): "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes" Jn. 5:21. The giving of life is a work of the Father which the Father has shared with the Son.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (But) even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jn 11:21-26

In this passage we have scripture's most profound theological statement regarding the resurrection. Martha is professing the faith which some Jews held since the Exile --the dead will rise at the end of time. Jesus takes the conversation to a whole different plane. "I AM the resurrection". To say that I can/will raise your brother at the end of time is one thing. To say "I AM the resurrection" is something much more profound. It is to assert a cosmic dimension, both a cosmic and a cosmic-superseding factor. This indicates that his own resurrection is the reason why there is a resurrection for anyone, anything else, of any cosmic time. It is to say that because of his resurrection the whole of creation will not end in death. All creatures will die but death is no longer the end. It has become a passageway, a passage way for all of creation.

In raising Lazarus or better, revitalizing him, Jesus proves his power over life. But it is only in his own resurrection that we get a glimpse of what resurrection means. It is not revitalization, not a restoration to present life, not a renewed continuation of life as

we know it. It is something entirely different. Paul says that it is beyond our power to comprehend:

But as it is written: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him," this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. 1 Cor 2:9,10.

The Spirit helps us to believe and to hope. The gospel of John the Beloved gives us two examples of what resurrection might mean. Jesus compares entering into the Kingdom to birth: "Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Jn 3:3. And at the Supper on the last night Jesus again refers to the image of birth as he explains that what he and his own are about to endure is comparable to labor pains (Jn 16:21). Birth becomes an apt metaphor for resurrection. The child in the womb has no concept of the world outside—of enhanced seeing, of enhanced hearing, of freedom of movement, of personal development. We are like that child. We are in the womb of Christ, resurrection will be our birth and we can no more comprehend what that new life will be like than can the child in the womb can imagine life after birth. All we know for certain is that substance remains but is completely transformed.

The second image we gain is actually found in all the gospels but John the Beloved has his own version of it: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" Jn 12:24. Paul also used this image before the gospels were written:

But someone may say, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come back?" You fool! What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be but a bare kernel of wheat, perhaps, or of some other kind; 1 Cor 15:35-7

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious; It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one. 1 Cor 15:42-44.

The seed sown in the ground is very different in appearance from the plant it produces. Yet the same life is found in both. The seed undergoes a transformation underground and comes up as something which appears quite different. Paul had a personal experience of the risen Christ as did John the Beloved. They each recognized Christ in a transformed state. This is the first thing that we learn about the Resurrection—it means transformation. The same person continues to exist but now in a transformed state. How this is done is God's to know. Modern science cannot conceive of any way and tells us that the whole universe is destined for death and nothingness in another 100 billion years. The laws of science as presently postulated cannot comprehend how anyone or anything can escape this death. Science, however, is in its infancy. It is possible that it

may never mature to the point of giving possible explanations for how this could happen before our species goes extinct in its present existence.

For John the Beloved Jesus' use of the seed metaphor harkens back again to the Genesis stories of creation: "Then the Lord God planted a garden of delights...Gen 2:8. God is planting a new creation, a creation of delight for the Godself. Jesus is both the new Adam whom God places there and the seed God plants in the new creation. John the Beloved makes sure we know that Jesus is buried in a garden:

"They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried" Jn 19:40-1.

Paul does not make reference to the tomb of Jesus. It is as though having seen the risen Christ, he has no need to consider it. John the beloved was there and did see it. He even went inside. What he saw convinced him that Jesus had risen. The burial cloths were lying there and the face piece folded lying by itself. Some would argue that the face and other cloths would indicate that no thieves had taken the body because they would not go to the trouble of trying to disengage the cloth from the body given the way it would have stuck to the flesh which had open and bloody wounds. But for John the Beloved there is an entirely different significance. The Risen Jesus, the new Adam, unlike the old sinful Adam (Gen. 3:7-11) had no need of clothing in the presence of God and like Moses he had laid aside the veil that covered his face because he was going to the Father (Ex 34:34).

It is not just the garden, however, that we need to consider to understand what John the Beloved has to reveal to us about the resurrection. It is to the relationships within the Godself that we need to look. The profound mutuality between the Father and Son is characterized by a constant "face to face" exchange (Jn 1:1). The dynamic of this exchange is self-giving—one to the other and the other back to the one. "The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him" Jn 3:35. Yet it seems that there is still one thing which the Father had not given over to Jesus because at the Supper he prays: "Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began" Jn 17:5. This final glorification of the Word incarnate would come as he surrendered to death on the cross. This is not because the Father is too mean to give it to him without that sacrifice. It is because, Jesus in his own person as the new Adam has brought mankind and all of creation back into the position of surrender, of love—love is a self-surrendering. This mutual self-surrendering—Jesus giving up his human life, the Father raising him giving Jesus' humanity the glory the Word had from all eternity, elicits (as mutual self-emptying always does) a new outpouring of love. This happens in the fullness of the Spirit coming to all as the Spirit is the mutual love of the Creator and the Word. The Spirit is now released and can renew creation, "the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30). This combination of mutual self-surrender and the outpouring of the Spirit is for John the Beloved the new creation.

To understand how he sees this unfolding we have to realize why and how the gospels were written. They were written to fulfill a keen spiritual need especially on the part of Jewish converts who were used to hearing the stories of their Jewish faith read and commented on every Sabbath. There was great need for liturgical texts which would present the Christian stories alongside the Hebrew stories so that the faithful could hear them and hear the commentaries on them to strengthen their faith. In the case of John



the Beloved the “farewell speeches” of Jesus at the last Supper were probably read with pauses and commentaries between each mini-chiasm with the “Breaking of the Bread” coming either right before or during the readings and continuing vigil service or the readings being culminated with the Eucharistic meal.

The Easter vigil would have been more elaborate and at least for John the Beloved’s community, it would have included the Genesis readings, the Passover readings and the account of the passion/resurrection because for him there was no separating the death of Jesus from his resurrection. We see that his passion account is really a parallel genesis story. John’s gospel is the telling of the first chapters of Genesis over again for the new creation. He tells us that it begins in a garden as did the first creation.

When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered Jn 18:1.

When the soldiers arrive with the temple officials Jesus speaks to them:

So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, “Whom are you looking for?” They answered him, “Jesus the Nazorean.” He said to them, “I AM.” Judas his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, “I AM,” they turned away and fell to the ground. Jn 18:3-6

Here John the Beloved has created a scene which he uses to demarcate the first creation from the new creation. For John the Beloved’s would-be converts this would have represented the moment of decision—do they truly seek a crucified Messiah? Those whom Jesus addresses the first time in the text when Judas is specifically mentioned twice are those who belong to the first creation—those who sought the “I AM” in order to become gods themselves or who seek Jesus like Judas did for his own profit. They “fall to the ground.” This is John the Beloved’s way of identifying them with Adam who falls back into ground. God had told Adam (the one taken from the earth as his name means) that because of his disobedience he would return to the earth,

By the sweat of your face  
shall you get bread to eat,  
Until you return to the ground,  
from which you were taken;  
For you are soil,  
and to soil you shall return." Gen 3:19

For John the Beloved there is a parallel—sinful Adam falls back into the earth and sinful men seeking Jesus “turned away and fell to the ground.” This is the garden of the first creation. Humankind is seeking God but for the wrong reasons. They wanted to be “like” God, actually to be equal to God, determining what is right and wrong.

No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be

opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit... Gen 3:5-6.

In other words, death is the result of this act of disobedience when they ate the fruit God told them not to eat. In John's parallel account this death and falling (return) to ground is symbolized by how Judas and the assailants fell to the ground. At this point in the narrative there most likely would have been a pause and John the Beloved would have commented on the first Genesis creation accounts showing how it all ended with Adam's and Eve's disobedience then return to the ground in death.

It matters little whether this falling back on the ground in the gospel story actually happened--John was employing a literary technique to demonstrate what happened in the first creation account when humans sought the Creator, the I AM, for the wrong reasons as does Judas in this story. He is twice mentioned at this point.

When the narrative picked up again, the same question is asked this time with no mention of Judas:

So he again asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazorean." Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go" Jn 18:7.

In the question "Whom are you looking for?" we can hear echoes of the question Jesus asked his first disciples in John the Beloved's gospel: "Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for...?" Jn. 1:38. We can also hear echoes of the questions asked of the seekers who came to John the Beloved's community seeking Baptism. And we can hear an echo of the question asked even of parents bringing a child for baptism: "What do you ask of the church?" John the Beloved wants to be sure that they recognize the divinity of Christ (I AM) in the Adam of the new creation: "if you are looking for me, let these men go." Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the great figure of the Jewish faith, who is laying down his life for his sheep. Further he is "Jesus the Nazorean" whom the first disciples found at the beginning of the gospel:

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth. Jn 1:45

To those disciples and now to any would-be believers, Jesus, the man for Nazareth, is the new Adam who, in contrast to the first Adam, is obedient:

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" Jn 18:10-11.

Actually, John the Beloved mentions the "garden" three times in the passion narrative which begins and ends in the same physical area. Jesus and the disciples go out to the garden Jn. 18:1; Peter is accused of being in the garden with him Jn. 18:26 and

Jesus is buried in the garden near where he was crucified (cf. Jn 19:41). The other evangelists refer to the hillside with olive groves on it adjacent to the city as “the Mount of Olives.” John who lived in Jerusalem would have been very familiar with the designation “Mount of Olives.” He uses it when he tells the story of the Feast of Booths. Those contesting with Jesus went home, “while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives” Jn. 8:1. His hour had not come. But in the passion narrative Jesus’ hour has come: “When Jesus had said this, he raised his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you...”Jn 17:1

John the Beloved deliberately uses the designation “garden” because in his mind the Mount of Olives is now the new Garden of Eden. And the new creation story which his gospel has been revealing reaches the moment of temptation where the first Adam failed. Here the new Adam, the obedient one, identifies himself, here he is buried like the wheat kernel and here he is resurrected, beginning the new creation.

John the Beloved gives us both unity of place, a garden, and unity within the Godself where the Father pours himself out glorifying the son in response to the Son’s pouring himself out in order to bring all of humanity, all of creation, into the bosom of the Godself through this mutual outpouring of love. This is Resurrection and life. Not that we shall not die, but that there is greater life beyond death—a life that was always our destiny because of love.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet." But when it says that everything has been subjected, it is clear that it excludes the one who subjected everything to him. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will (also) be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. 1 Cor 15:26-8.

Because God did not make death,  
nor does El rejoice in the destruction of the living.  
For El fashioned all things that they might have being;  
and the creatures of the world are wholesome,  
And there is not a destructive drug among them  
nor any domain of the nether world on earth Wis 1:13-4

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## I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life

And the Word became flesh  
and pitched his tent among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth Jn 1:14.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me Jn 14:6

It could be said that John the Beloved was profoundly Jewish in his love of and immersion in Jewish concepts. We cannot really grasp what Jesus is saying to us in John the Beloved's gospel unless we have some idea of what the words "way" and "truth" and "life" meant to the Jewish men and women disciples who were with Jesus at his Last Supper. We first encounter two of these words together in a verse from the second creation story in Genesis, a story which held special significance for John the Beloved: When EL (God) expelled the man, EL settled him east of the garden of Eden; and EL stationed the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24).

It is not any sword the angel uses to defend the tree of life but a "revolving" one indicating that there was no way from any side for anyone to approach the tree of life. All access had been cut off. John the Beloved as deeply immersed in the creation stories as he is, sees Jesus as both the tree of life and the way to it. The next significant use of the word "way" comes a little further in the book of Genesis:

Indeed, I have singled him out that he may direct his sons and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord may carry into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him" Gen 18:19.

From this passage we get a glimpse of how important the concept of the "way of the Lord" was to the Hebrew people. Keeping that way was both a sacred obligation given to their father Abraham and an identifying mark for them. Yet there are times when the prophets childe them for not following it

The Lord will give you the bread you need  
and the water for which you thirst.  
No longer will your Teacher hide himself,  
but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher,

While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears:  
"This is the way; walk in it,"  
when you would turn to the right or to the left Isa. 30:20-21

This prophesy from Isaiah was especially dear to John the Beloved because he witnessed Jesus giving himself as bread to his own. He heard Jesus promise the Spirit as water filling every thirst. And he testifies that “with our own eyes” we have seen:

What was from the beginning,  
 what we have heard,  
 what we have seen with our eyes,  
 what we looked upon  
 and touched with our hands  
 concerns the Word of life--

for the life was made visible;  
 we have seen it and testify to it  
 and proclaim to you the eternal life  
 that was with the Father and was made visible to us  
 1 Jn 1:1-2.

When John the Beloved first heard John the Baptist identify himself with the voice in the prophesy of Isaiah, the words were “loaded” so to speak for him:

A voice cries out:  
 In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!  
 Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!  
 Isa. 40:3.

Thus says the Lord, your redeemer,  
 the Holy One of Israel:  
 I, the Lord, your God,  
 teach you what is for your good,  
 and lead you on the way you should go Isa 48:17.

John the Baptist was saying that this Jesus he was pointing out is “the way”—that is, Jesus is the way to the tree of life. He is the one who shows us how to live accord to “the way of the Lord”, the inheritance of Abraham, further, he leads the way personally. John is the only evangelist who has Jesus self-identify as “the Way.” But for the Jews who first believed in Jesus calling him “The Way” gave them also a name for themselves—“followers of the Way” became the first name they would give to themselves:

Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains Acts 9:1-2.

## The Truth

A striking similarity between Paul and John the Beloved is the frequent use of “truth.” It was obviously a concept dear to the heart of each of them and key to their perception of Christ. John uses it some twenty-one times in contrast to the synoptic gospels which use it only twice. Throughout his epistles, Paul uses it over forty times. The Jewish spirituality of these two men is undoubtedly the most powerful influence in their writings even though they see the fulfillment of that spirituality in Christ rather than in Judaism. In Jewish spirituality to walk in truth was to imitate God.

The three letters which make up the word “truth” in Hebrew are also the first letters of the three last words in the second account of creation in Genesis. God is truth because there is total agreement between what God says and what God does (the work of creation).

John the Beloved gives us an exhortation in his first letter that closely expresses this concept:

Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.  
(Now) this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and  
reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn,  
for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. 1. Jn 3:19-  
20.

Paul speaks of the truth of the gospel because it is achieving what is said:

Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the  
gospel, that has come to you. Just as in the whole world it is  
bearing fruit and growing, so also among you, from the day you  
heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth, Col 1:6

The gospel itself is truth because in it there is agreement between what it proclaims and the fruit it bears in the lives of the believers. The three Hebrew letters that make up the word “truth” are also the first, last and middle letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is possible that the inspiration for the proclamation of the Son of Man in the vision at the beginning of the book of Revelation derives not from the Greek letters, Alpha and Omega, but originally from the Hebrew letters for the first and last which translated would be Alpha and Omega.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He  
touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the  
first and the last Rev 1:17.

The meaning of this revelation would then be not simply that I am the first and the last, but also, at least to the Jewish mind, I am the one who is Truth.

Throughout his gospel John the Beloved constantly refers to truth beginning with the prolog, “and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth Jn. 1:14. Jesus frequently insisted with the Pharisees that he spoke the truth—his words and his deeds were in entire agreement.

You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out

your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? Jn 8:44-46

John the Beloved tells us that after the multiplication of loaves Jesus indicates that the Father has "set his seal" that is the seal of truth on him because he speaks the words of the Father and does the work of the Father. They recognize this concept of truth (doing the work of God Gen 2:3) and ask what work they need to do:

Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." Jn 6:27-29

The Exodus gives us one of the qualities of God: "Thus the Lord passed before him (Moses) and cried out, "The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and truth Ex 34:6. When Jesus proclaims: "I AM the truth" he is identifying himself with the revelation to Moses.

For John the Beloved not to cling to this truth was unthinkable. It was the guilt of those who belong to the sinful first creation with fallen Adam. He could see that God is greater than our hearts but could not seem to accept that God being greater than our minds could find a way to someone who was not able to come to belief as he, John, understood God to be Christ. God can still be greater than our minds and can find a way to reach even those.

## **I AM the Life**

There are three lessons John the Beloved wants us to take from what he writes about life. First, Jesus the incarnate Word is the source of all life --that is everything that exists came into being through this Word. Second, Jesus is the Resurrection and Life-- that is Resurrection brings a new form of life both in this existence and in the existence to come. Christ is the source of this new form of life also. Third, life in Christ is eternal— that is: life no longer means prosperity and posterity in this existence. Rather life now opens out to life without end which is a sharing in the inner life of God with the Father, Son and Spirit indwelling within us now and drawing us into Themselves along with those we love in everlasting joy as we pass through the gate of death.

To understand the new creation we have first of all to appreciate how the first creation came into being and how the two are related. Both are the work of the creativity of God who destined all of creation to share in the glory of the Godself. The Word of God was destined to become a human in the fullness of time and to lead creation into the fullness of this glory. Intelligent creatures are given free will so they can freely love as God freely loves. This mutuality is the glory of God—mutuality within the Godself and mutuality with us drawing us into the mutuality within the Godself. Some intelligent creatures made the choice of loving themselves more than God and their effect upon the



rest of creation was that it was drawn away from its path to glory. Heroic obedience was the means of restoring creation to this path into glory. This obedience reverses the harm done by those who prefer loving themselves to loving God. EL does not take away or destroy the first creation; instead it becomes the seedbed for the new creation which is transformed life due to the death of the seed which is Christ and his resurrection. When this seed sprouts into resurrection, he draws all of creation with him into newness of life and the great characteristic of this life is that it is “eternal” --it can never again be touched by death. Death is robbed of its victory:” Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? 1 Cor 15:55.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace (i.e. favor, life) in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. Rom 5:1,2.

John the Beloved writes of “life” over forty times in his gospel. Seventeen of those references are to “eternal” life.

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life Jn 5:24.

Lastly John the Beloved tells us that he has written his gospel so that we may believe in Christ and our belief will bring us life:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name Jn 20:30.

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## I AM the Vine

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower Jn 15:1

If we could travel back in time to be visitors to the community of John the Beloved possibly located in Ephesus in the first century, the Holy Thursday vigil would be a special night. The community like all the Christian communities of the first century would be a small community --not more than 40 people gathering in a "house" church, which was his home or the home of another member of the community. The service would begin with everyone washing one another's feet. That sacred custom done in accordance with Jesus' command at his last Supper to wash each other's feet persisted in the church of the first centuries. After the washing and introductory greetings the community would probably hear one of its storytellers—someone who could read or had committed the story to memory as was usually the case. If they had a Jewish scroll of the Torah, the story of the Passover would be read. Then someone would read or recite the story of Jesus' travel to Jerusalem for his last Passover, what we know as John chapter twelve. Guests who were non-Jewish would be given special recognition and at this point perfumed oil might be used on everyone's feet to honor Mary and her anointing of Jesus.

The community would then have a meal together and enjoy lamb, herbs, bread and wine all blessed with the appropriate Jewish blessings. After the meal they would again hear scripture. This time it would be the chiasm of what we know as John chapter six. John the Beloved would then elaborate on Jesus as the true paschal meal and on why Jesus wanted to give us this deeply personal contact with him as bread and wine. Next the community would celebrate the "Breaking of the Bread" together partaking of the Bread of Jesus' body and drinking the Wine of his blood.

By now the evening would be far spent and everyone would take a break for a few minutes of conversation and physical movement. Then they would re-gather as the vigil continued. They would sing songs that members of the community had composed or some that they may have appropriated from other Christian communities like that in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours  
in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
coming in human likeness;  
and found human in appearance,

he humbled himself,  
becoming obedient to death,  
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name

that is above every name,  
 that at the name of Jesus  
     every knee should bend,  
     of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
 and every tongue confess that  
     Jesus Christ is Lord,  
     to the glory of God the Father Phil 2:5-11

When they had sung several songs or psalms they would listen to Jn. 13:31 to 14:31, the chiasm which has at its center Jesus' proclamation that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life. They would then hear John the Beloved or another senior member of the community talk about what those words meant. Next would follow some quiet time to reflect on what had been said and perhaps some personal sharing about it. They would take a break for some refreshments and a cold drink.

As they re-gathered a soloist would sing some verses from Psalm 80:

You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
 you drove away the nations and planted it.

You cleared the ground;  
 it took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered by its shadow,  
 the cedars of God by its branches.

It sent out boughs as far as the sea,  
 shoots as far as the river.

Why have you broken down the walls,  
 so that all who pass by pluck its fruit?

The boar from the forest strips the vine;  
 the beast of the field feeds upon it.

Turn again, LORD of hosts;  
 look down from heaven and see;  
 Attend to this vine, Ps 80: 9-15

When the solo was over another member of the community would recite verses from Isaiah:

Israel is a luxuriant vine  
 whose fruit matches its growth.  
 The more abundant his fruit,  
 the more altars he built;  
 The more productive his land,  
 the more sacred pillars he set up Isa 10:1

And finally someone would read/recite Jn 15: 1-18 :

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.

When the proclamation was finished, John the Beloved would speak to the community explaining that in the first Creation God planted a vine, the vine of Israel. That vine had become diseased as they heard in the Psalm and the reading from Isaiah. So in the new creation, God planted a new vine—the person of Jesus! And on this night you have drunk of the blood of this vine crushed for our offenses Isa 53:5. At this point one of the musicians would invite everyone to sing these verses from Isaiah with him.

Who would believe what we have heard?  
To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up like a sapling before him,  
like a shoot from the parched earth;  
There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him,  
nor appearance that would attract us to him.

He was spurned and avoided by men,  
a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,  
One of those from whom men hide their faces,

spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Yet it was our infirmities that he bore,  
our sufferings that he endured,  
While we thought of him as stricken,  
as one smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our offenses,  
crushed for our sins,  
Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,  
by his stripes we were healed.

We had all gone astray like sheep,  
each following his own way;  
But the LORD laid upon him  
the guilt of us all.

Though he was harshly treated, he submitted  
and opened not his mouth;  
Like a lamb led to the slaughter  
or a sheep before the shearers,  
he was silent and opened not his mouth.

Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away,  
and who would have thought any more of his destiny?  
When he was cut off from the land of the living,  
and smitten for the sin of his people,

A grave was assigned him among the wicked  
and a burial place with evildoers,  
Though he had done no wrong  
nor spoken any falsehood.

(But the LORD was pleased  
to crush him in infirmity.)  
If he gives his life as an offering for sin,  
he shall see his descendants in a long life,  
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction  
he shall see the light in fullness of days;  
Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,  
and their guilt he shall bear.

Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,  
and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,  
Because he surrendered himself to death  
and was counted among the wicked;  
And he shall take away the sins of many,

and win pardon for their offenses Isa 53:1-12.

When the song was finished John the Beloved would remind everyone that when the fruit of this vine was crushed it gave us the wine of the Eucharist. When you drink the wine you honor his sufferings and because he has made you one of his branches, you must now bear fruit—fruit willing to be crushed like his was, willing to be made wine for others. And he would remind everyone that when the bride drank a cup of wine provided by the groom at the betrothal meal, the covenant between them was sealed. At this point the gathered community of John the Beloved would take a short break again to reflect upon what John the Beloved had said.

As the community comes together again one of their members is prepared to read John Chapter sixteen, The Bridegroom's Speech before he returns to his Father's house. The key words being: "I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" Jn. 16: 28. Everyone recognizes the references to a Jewish wedding festival when the groom comes to the bride's house to seal the betrothal. He offers her a cup of wine and then makes promises to go back to his father's house and prepare a place for her. Jesus had already said: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be" Jn 14:3.

John the Beloved explains that now Jesus offers another wedding present, a pledge that his love is always with us until the day of the actual wedding. The present is the Spirit.

But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.  
He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and  
will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me,  
because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.  
Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that  
he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. "A little while  
and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and  
you will see me." Jn 16:13-16.

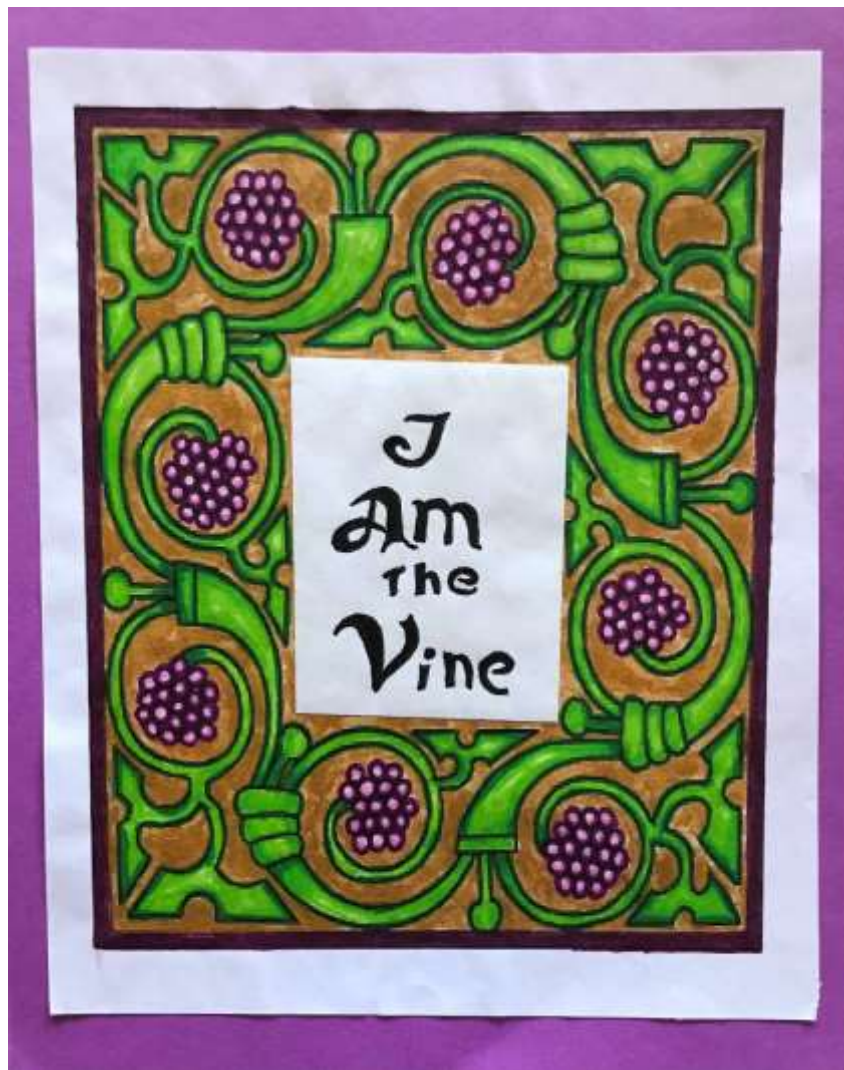
At this point John the Beloved explains to the community that the Spirit was released at Jesus' death and Jesus breathed the Spirit upon them all the first time he came to the community after his resurrection. This Spirit remains with us helping us access the presence of the Father and the Son within us: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" Jn 14:23.

There is a particular joy among the members of the community as they take a few minutes to rest and refresh themselves again. They talk excitedly about their own experiences of the Spirit and want to hear more from John the Beloved. The evening began with a celebration of the Lord's Supper and now as they come to the last gathering of the vigil their focus is again shifted to the body of Christ.

When everyone is seated again, a storyteller recites/reads the story of the dedication of the temple by Solomon in 1 Kings 8:22-66. Then another community member proclaims John seventeen. John the Beloved explains that Jesus' body is the dwelling place of God. Jesus consecrated his body that night in preparation for the sacrifice of himself in that Temple the next day. And so would end the vigil.

We can best understand the speeches of Jesus at the end of John the Beloved's gospel if we grasp how John the Beloved intended them for use by the community. Jewish communities held vigils for their special celebrations such as Passover. The Christian communities which were made up of a major proportion of Jewish converts would have fashioned similar vigils and combined readings from the Hebrew Testament with what their own Evangelists and Paul wrote. John the Beloved arranges many sayings/speeches of Jesus to fit this format on the night of the Supper, which came the night before the Jewish celebration. It became the Christian celebration, the Christian Passover. The image of the Vine, the crushed vine giving the blood of its fruit for the joy of humankind, becomes a beautiful image of Christ shedding his blood for us, for our joy: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" J. 15:11.

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## I AM Lifted Up

He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him Jn 1:11

No one has gone up to heaven except the one who  
has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just  
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the  
Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes  
in him may have eternal life Jn 3:13-15

Many scripture scholars think that the reason for the very sharp and acrimonious disputes between Jesus and “the Jews” in John the Beloved’s gospel is that there was animosity between John the Beloved’s community and neighboring Jewish communities years after Jesus resurrection. That may certainly be part of the reason but there may be another. John the Beloved is the only evangelist who was actually present himself at the events he writes about. Moreover he was a very young man who had access to many inner chambers in Jerusalem where Jewish authorities had intense discussions.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in Jn 18:15-16.

The acrimony in his gospel may reflect the reality of the situation Jesus faced. The other evangelists once or twice removed from the events imagine that the cleansing of the temple was the event that set off the impetus to arrest Jesus during holy week. John the beloved has a different version. He was at the raising of Lazarus just a couple miles from Jerusalem. There was easy access for both sympathizers and spies from Jerusalem:

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles  
away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and  
Mary to comfort them about their brother Jn 11:18,19.

The disciples were well aware of the animosity that already existed:

Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."  
The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to  
stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jn 11:7,8).

John the Beloved sees the raising of Lazarus at which he was present as the immediate occasion for the determination to find a way to actually carry out the desire of the Pharisaical leaders to annihilate Jesus.

So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting  
her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her,



presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, "What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish." He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to kill him. So Jesus no longer walked about in public among the Jews, but he left for the region near the desert, to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before Passover to purify themselves. They looked for Jesus and said to one another as they were in the temple area, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?" For the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should inform them, so that they might arrest him. Jn 11:31; 45-57

The scene John the Beloved presents is that during most of his ministry whenever Jesus came to Jerusalem there was immense tension between him and the authorities. John the Beloved lived there and was not always with Jesus in Galilee. He seems to have his finger on the pulse of the city more readily than the other evangelists. It is quite possible that the cleansing of the Temple happened as John the Beloved tells us during the first Passover after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. With the Spirit upon him, he protested physically to the way the authorities had reduced religion to a slaughter-house assembly line that made lots of money for them and kept the people locked in guilt and poverty oppressed by both Rome and their own high priests. From that time on he was a marked man. There is talk of his death every time he visits Jerusalem for one of the pilgrimage feasts. A short while before his final Passover, he raises Lazarus back to life right on the doorstep as it were of Jerusalem. This is a far greater miracle than any healing he had done so far and they knew that they had to stop him or lose their own authority. This was something much more threatening than cleansing the temple as disruptive as that had been.

Six days before the fatal Passover Jesus came to Bethany again and a crowd approached him and Lazarus:

(The) large crowd of the Jews found out that he was there and came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. And the chief priests plotted to kill

Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus because of him. Jn 12:9-11.

That same crowd from Jerusalem came to Bethpage to form a procession for him into Jerusalem:

So the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from death continued to testify. This was (also) why the crowd went to meet him, because they heard that he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him" Jn 12:17-19.

For John the Beloved, there is irony in the fact that the restoring of one life, Lazarus', will be the occasion of taking another life, Jesus' own. The response to the greatest of Jesus miracles is the greatest act of hatred the leaders are capable of. John the Beloved again finds profound connections with this and with the book of Genesis --this time the story of Abraham. Jerusalem was the site where God told Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. Abraham obediently took Isaac for the sacrifice but then God intervened:

But the God's messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh; hence people now say, "On this mountain God will provide (see to it)" Gen 22:11-14.

So also Lazarus was spared death, and God provided another sheep for the sacrifice, Jesus! John the Beloved ties the two stories together closely. Jesus waits two days before setting out for Jerusalem just as Abraham had taken two days before his journey there to sacrifice his son: "So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea'" "On the third day Abraham caught sight of the place from a distance." (Jn 11:6/7; Gen 22:4) John the beloved further indicates that just as Isaac had carried the wood to be used in the sacrifice where he was destined to be the victim, Jesus carried the wood of his own cross: "Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha Jn. 9:16-17. Likewise there is significance in what Jesus tells the assembled crowd when Lazarus comes forth: "Untie him and let him go" Jn. 11: 44. Abraham had bound Isaac when he placed him on the wood for the sacrifice. In Jewish spirituality there is a need to bind oneself to be prepared to sacrifice to God. Jesus was releasing Lazarus and becoming the sacrifice himself.

The scenario John the Beloved gives us is formulated around major Jewish festivals. This indicates both Jesus' profound Jewishness and the fact that it was when Jesus was in Jerusalem that John the Beloved had the most time to spend with Jesus.

After his baptism Jesus traveled to Galilee; then for the feast of Passover, he and some of his new disciples went to Jerusalem. There he cleansed the Temple to the consternation of the priests and Pharisees.

The next big Jewish feast would be Pentecost and Jesus again goes to Jerusalem like a good Jew for the festival. “Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep (Gate) a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled” Jn. 5:2-3. Jesus proceeds to heal a cripple by the pool and tells him to take up his mat and walk. Because it is the Sabbath, the Pharisees are furious. They are celebrating the giving of the Law and Jesus has healed this man and told him to carry his mat. In their eyes this is a violation of the Law.

For the next Passover celebration Jesus is in Galilee where he multiplies bread and gives the discourse about the Bread of Life creating as it were a parallel Passover. For John the Beloved, this is the apex of Jesus ministry and provides a sorting out of who will remain with him.

For the autumn feast of Tabernacles (Booths) Jesus goes to Jerusalem but on the quiet at first. Then he bests the Pharisees in an argument about the Law and they contrive to prove that he does not observe the Law by dragging a woman before him whom they spied on and then dragged out of bed at dawn. Again he bests them this time by saying nothing and writing with his finger. They are furious and intense arguments ensue. Jesus leaves the Temple area. As he does so he sees a man born blind. Jesus heals the man and this on top of the arguments and humiliation over the woman caught in adultery leads the Pharisees in a state of rage.

When Jesus returns to the city in the winter for the feast of the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Temple more arguments ensue. By now they are super sensitive to his coming for a festival. Jesus departs for Galilee and he is there when Mary and Martha send for him because Lazarus is ill.

We see that Jesus’ keeping of the Jewish festivals in Jerusalem created an escalating pattern of animosity and more than once they wanted to stone him. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus deliberately waits until a large crowd from Jerusalem has gathered at the home of Martha and Mary for the funeral and mourning rites. These are the two days of Abraham’s journey to Jerusalem. Some of these people are on the verge of faith and Jesus knows that this miracle will convince them:

So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said,  
“Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always  
hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that  
they may believe that you sent me” Jn 11:41-42.

Jesus knowingly put himself in harm’s way to bring belief to the crowd. And John the Beloved tells us that this is the last straw so to speak for the Pharisees. We see here a pattern of gradually escalating rancor. It comes to head just before Passover. They wait until they think they can convince Pilate to put Jesus to death and they have the advantage with Judas’ help of capturing Jesus at night out of sight of the holiday crowds. Cleansing the Temple may have been a major aggravation for the Pharisees and priests but not enough grounds to arrest Jesus or put him to death. The Synoptic tradition, not in touch with the escalating rancor in Jerusalem as John the Beloved was, could not find any activity of Jesus so outrageous that it would trigger his arrest except the cleansing of the Temple. It is possible that John the Beloved transposed the event for his own purposes, but it is more likely that, knowing all that happened each time Jesus was in

Jerusalem and what a catalyst the raising of Lazarus was, John the Beloved has given us the correct chronology.

This is all the more poignant because Jesus was being a faithful Jew by going to Jerusalem to celebrate the great festivals. He could have avoided the city and the celebrations to do his own thing in Galilee but he went both to show his own Jewishness and to be able to speak to the crowds. This faith and these people were “his own.” He came to his own and was disowned by them. The rejection is a huge factor in Jesus’ passion. John the Beloved comments on it at the beginning of his gospel: “He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him” Jn. 1:11. Most Christians do not grasp this because we think of Jesus as “Christian.” Christianity did not begin until Jesus’ Resurrection. During his earthly Jesus life was profoundly Jewish. While it is true that the Jewish people as a whole did not accept him, nevertheless the disciples and a large majority of the early Christians were converts from Judaism as was Paul. They recognized in Jesus the totality, the fulfillment of Judaism.

If Jesus had died in Galilee as a result of some misplaced Roman brutality, it would have been easier to dismiss him as a rebel but he was lifted up for betrayal and crucifixion by his own in the very heart of their religion’s sacred place at the high point of one of their most significant rituals. Rome was merely the instrument they used to accomplish this. Jesus faced his final “hour,” the hour of glory, in this city where he had spent so many hours arguing with those who would not open their minds.

Apparently a very young John the Beloved had overheard Jesus explaining the death he knew awaited him to Nicodemus on one of his first visits to the city:

No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” Jn 3:13-15

This symbol of the serpent mounted on a pole became one that John the Beloved carries through to the end. It was a strange event recorded in the book of Numbers:

...and the Lord said to Moses, "Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he will recover." Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered. Num 21: 8,9.

Because the story involves the image of a serpent it has echoes of the second creation story for John the Beloved. He sees this as applying to the new creation. Adam and Eve had, so to speak, been bitten by the serpent. Now what the serpent had done—brought about death—will be mounted on the cross as Jesus dies but as anyone who believes in him, gazes upon him in his sacrifice, they will be freed from death and have eternal life.

Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this indicating the kind of death he would die. So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. Then how can you say that

the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jn  
12:31-32

John the Beloved had listened with great attention to everything Jesus said about his relationship with the Father and he understood that Jesus' "hour" of supreme personal surrender was something Jesus humanly needed to do and thus bring all of creation into the glory of the Father as was the Creator's original design which had been sidetracked by sin. As the Word he always shared that glory. Now in his humanity he was bringing all creation into that glory.

When Jesus had said this, he raised his eyes to heaven and said,  
"Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began Jn 17:1-6

## ALLELUIA

the great trek is over  
Jesus has returned to his father  
he has passed through the sea of sorrow  
he has wandered the desert of loneliness and betrayal  
he has fought cruel foes along the way  
he has shed his blood  
he has given his life.

he has returned  
lifted up on the cross he gave his heart to the Father  
the Father accepted the perfect gift  
true passover was accomplished  
the blood of the lamb had thwarted death  
a man had bridged the chasm  
a son of Adam had returned to paradise  
but he was more than a son of Adam  
he was Second Adam  
he did not make the trek for himself alone  
we were in his heart  
we were one with him  
he had become one of us to save all of us  
he blazed a trail for us  
he went on ahead so we could follow

Now he has risen  
He has ascended

He sits at the right hand of the Father  
all power in heaven and earth is his  
He calls us to come to the Father in our turn  
He sends his Spirit to lead us  
to urge us  
to make us strong

we can make the trek too  
we can walk in love as Christ has loved us  
we can give our hearts to God  
we can live our lives for one another  
we can bear one another's burdens  
weep with those who weep  
befriend those who are alone  
be loyal to those we befriend

thus we pass over from death to life  
from sin to holiness  
thus we tread in the footsteps of Jesus  
our life becomes his Life  
his Death becomes ours  
our sacrifices become his Sacrifice  
his Rising becomes ours  
selfless love is Easter life  
selfless love is return to the Father

we hear your voice, Lord Jesus  
Father, we are coming

Jim Scully

[home](#)

