

*“Cherish and Nurture the Family Relationships!”*

Our Reading claims the previous 20 chapters of the gospel were written by a disciple, who was often referred to as *“the beloved disciple”* or *“the one whom Jesus loved”*. Other references to this disciple provide insight into the possibility of a family relationship between the gospel author and Jesus. So, this Text goes well with Mother’s Day and the Festival of the Christian Home.

Let’s consider how the Scripture calls attention to the gospel author and his identity. It is reported in **verse 20**, *“Peter turned around and saw behind him that other disciple, whom Jesus loved — the one who had leaned close to Jesus at the meal and had asked, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’”* It is stated in **vs. 24**, *“He is the disciple who spoke of these things, the one who also wrote them down; and we know that what he said is true.”* From my sabbatical study of the Gospel of John a little over ten years ago and from my continuing education since then on this gospel, I believe the **author was John, the son of Zebedee**.

In support of my contention, let’s examine who the women were that stood near the cross of Jesus. It is stated in **John 19:25**, *“Standing close to Jesus’ cross were his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”* We are also told in **Matthew 27:56**, *“Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the wife of Zebedee.”* It is a safe assumption that the women at the cross included Jesus’ mother, *“Mary”*. Comparing the rest of the two lists, the women at Jesus’ cross in both were – *“Mary Magdalene”* and another *“Mary”* who may have been both *“the wife of Clopas”* and *“the mother of James and Joseph”*. When we take those women out of the list, we are left with the Gospel of John having included Jesus’ *“mother’s sister”* while Matthew had *“the wife of Zebedee”*. I believe Jesus’ *“mother’s sister”* was *“the wife of Zebedee”*, who was therefore, **the mother of the brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee**. If I am correct, then John, the youngest of the disciples, was also a **first cousin of Jesus**.

Given Jesus’ biological brothers did not believe in him as the Messiah and God’s Son, during his public ministry, John, the son of Zebedee, would have been the **closest to a kid brother** from among believers and Jesus’ original disciples. If the author of the Gospel of John was also John, the son of Zebedee, then that helps explain why the gospel’s writer claimed a special relationship with Jesus and referred to himself as *“the disciple whom Jesus love”*. It would further explain why Jesus called the beloved disciple **to have a new relationship with his mother – one of mother and son**. **John 19:26-27** states, *“Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, ‘He is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘She is your mother.’ From that time the disciple took her to live in his home.”*

In today’s Reading, Peter knew of the special relationship between Jesus and the beloved disciple. Peter, along with the rest of the disciples assumed the Risen Jesus was returning to the Divine Parent but would someday come back to bring in the Kingdom of God. **So, Peter asked the Risen Son of God about the special “disciple whom Jesus loved” in verse 21**, saying, *“Lord, what about this man?”*

Jesus frequently dealt with the disciples’ jealousies among them. Perhaps showing some impatience, Jesus responded in **verse 22**, *“If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!”* Or in other words, quit being jealous and get on with the task of following my example and teachings. It was further disclosed in **verse 23**, *“So a report spread among the followers of Jesus that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die; he said, ‘If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?’”*

Those words of Jesus in **verse 22** may have been misreported in **Mark 9:1**. First of all, John did not mention the Transfiguration of Jesus as did the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Prior to the Transfiguration, Mark reported Jesus said in **9:1**, *“I tell you, there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.”* Has anyone seen up close and alive one of Jesus’

original disciples? None of us has and that makes Mark's version troubling.

Matthew and Luke copied Mark's report and made slight modifications. Perhaps they did that because they were troubled with how Mark's report seemed to have Jesus say some of the original disciples would still be alive when he returned to usher in the Kingdom of God. In **Matthew 16:28** the author modifies what Mark wrote **Jesus said to be, "I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Son of Man come as King."** There is a big difference between promising someone would see "the Kingdom of God come with power" and saying they would see Jesus "come as King" as Matthew recorded. Remember, during Jesus' Triumphant Entrance into Jerusalem many saw him come as King.

**In a similar fashion, Luke 9:27, also modified what Mark reported Jesus said to, "I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God."** I would say those who very soon saw Jesus Transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah saw the Kingdom of God. So, Jesus' promise was fulfilled according to Matthew and Luke. If, instead, one was to understand Jesus to have promised he would usher in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God before all of his original disciples had died, that would be troubling because Jesus has still not done it. Tradition says the disciple John lived to be very old. That may help explain why many early Christians expected Jesus to return during John, the son of Zebedee's life. Eventually, it was evident Jesus was not going to quickly return, so church leaders modified their expectations of when Jesus would return.

If John, the son of Zebedee, was the beloved disciple and Jesus' younger cousin, then I believe the Gospel of John reveals **Jesus put great emphasis on family relationships.** For example, he made sure his mother would be cared for after his death by directing Mary and her young nephew to adopt an even closer relationship of mother and son. Jesus did that while he was dying on his cross! Yet, Jesus' focus on his relationships – with his family, especially his mother, was matched by his love and concern for his disciples. **Jesus spent much of his last few hours and minutes prior to his arrest and speedy execution praying for his disciples, teaching them about their benefits from the gift of God's Holy Spirit, as well as, modeling for them how to love and serve one another.**

It is important for us to look out for our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers, as well as, our children and grandchildren, especially when they are vulnerable. Indeed, we are called to express the same self-giving agape love for our families, our church family, and the greater Christian family of all followers of Jesus Christ. And yes, when there is so much physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual suffering and pain among the multitude of people on this planet, we are also called to issue Jesus' invitation for them – everyone to be part of God's family. **Further, we are called to let our share of God's Self-Giving Agape Love show through us to others, so they will also come to experience our Divine Parent's Forgiveness, Healing, Reconciliation, and New Life!**

**Will we follow Jesus' example – will you and I cherish and nurture the family relationships? Will we follow his instructions to his mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved – to adopt and care for one another? Let not just our words but also our actions repeatedly declare a resounding "Yes!"** We will follow Jesus' example and call to cherish and nurture the Family Relationships Amen.