

## **Draw Near: The Beloved Disciple**

### **John 19:25-29**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Last week I introduced you to two men who chose to be secret disciples.

- Followers ... but not openly followers of Jesus.
- Men who preferred to linger in the shadows and remain silent when they could and should have spoken.
- Men who unwilling to risk the consequences of declaring their faith in Jesus.
- Men who chose to remain secret followers until after Jesus died.
  - Something happened in that final moment that caused them to say "I too am a follower of Jesus."
- We now know their names: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Tonight's story will end differently. The identity of the central character in this text remains a mystery even to this day.

Look how the text identifies him:

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27a)

That's it. Nothing more. The disciple who Jesus loved standing nearby. While we are not told his name, that phrase has earned this character a title:

The Beloved Disciple

The Beloved Disciple makes three other appearances in the Gospels, all recorded in the Gospel of John. It was only John who told us about Nicodemus, you may remember. Likewise it is only John's Gospel that talks about the Beloved Disciple.

- In John 13 (the Last Supper), right after Jesus announces that one of the 12 is about to betray him, we read:

One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. (John 13: 23)

- In John 20, Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb on Easter morning, and:

She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20:2)

- And finally, in John 21, as Jesus confronts Peter with the questions "Do you love me?" Peter feebly attempts to deal with his discomfort:

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" (John 21:20-21)

So who is this anonymous person, this one we only know as the "Beloved One?"

### **#1: IT IS NOT ...**

Despite what you have been told by author Dan Brown and *The DaVinci Code*, there is no historical evidence that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were secret lovers or married, and there is certainly no evidence that she is the anonymous Beloved One.

A simple read of the passage makes this clear. From the cross, Jesus clearly says to His mother:

"Woman, here is your son." (John 19:26)

Not daughter. Not daughter-in-law.

As hard as it may be for our American ears to hear, this was still a society in which women would struggle on their own. Mary Magdalene could not have done the task even if she were willing to try. The mother of Jesus needed the care and protection of another man now that Jesus was no longer able to do it.

So who was it?

### **#2: IT IS ...**

Here is what we know:

#### 1. He is a disciple

That doesn't necessarily mean that he was one of the 12. You might remember from last week that Joseph of Arimathea was described as a disciple – a secret disciple:

Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. (John 19:38)

Given the fact this Beloved Disciple was also present at the Last Supper makes it likely he was one of the 12.

#### 2. He was loved by Jesus

Not "the disciple loved Jesus." That was most certainly true. But the teaching here is that Jesus loved that disciple.

As a part of His final words to His disciples following the Last Supper, Jesus tells all of us who it is that He loves. Listen to these words:

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. (John 14:21)

This anonymous disciple is someone who has faithfully followed Jesus and put into practice those things Jesus taught.

### 3. He is nearby

When all of the other disciples fled, this one stayed.

- When Nicodemus and Joseph were still standing in shadows, this disciple was standing nearby.
  - Within eyesight...able to be clearly seen by a dying man
  - Within earshot ... able to hear the words of Jesus as He made a very special request

Maybe he had been haunted by the words Jesus had spoken the night before:

Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me."  
(Matthew 26:33)

Maybe he had been among those who fled when the soldiers arrested Jesus that night. But now he was here. At the cross.

## **APPLICATION**

All of your life you have been told this anonymous beloved disciple was John. And you are probably right. Most scholars agree. In his humility, John doesn't identify himself by name throughout the gospel. John wants the story to be about Jesus. He doesn't want to draw attention to himself.

His anonymity allows us to make two points of personal application:

### 1. John remains anonymous because Mary's life would be at risk

Church tradition (not Scripture) tells us that in the days that when the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem became most intense, John took Mary the mother of Jesus and moved to Ephesus. John would serve a prison on the isle of Patmos where he would write the Book of Revelation, and then return to Ephesus where he would die of old age – the only disciple to die a natural death. Mary died while living in Ephesus.

John's actions and his "Beloved Disciple" nickname, remind us of another teaching Jesus gave just before His death:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35)

Taking an older woman into your home and guaranteeing her support for the rest of her life is this new commandment in action.

2. John remains anonymous because his actions are the responsibility of all of us  
Much of the work of the God's kingdom is done by anonymous people, people who are obedient and faithful ... but never seek the limelight or get the credit for what they have done. We might say that:

In the Kingdom of God important roles are often played by anonymous actors.

This church will celebrate its 107<sup>th</sup> birthday in October. I have the honor of serving as the 11<sup>th</sup> Senior Pastor in this church's history. Only a few of you gathered here can name more than three others who have served in this role. The others aren't anonymous. Their pictures and names are posted in the staff hallway.

- Now think about the thousands of lay people who have served and worshipped here.

Anonymity forces us to focus on what was done rather than who did it. The legacy of the kingdom is on the work of Christ not the worker.

The action of this "Beloved Disciple" signals the beginning of a new family – the family of God – that gathers in the name of Jesus.

- A family where we all bear responsibility of caring for those younger and older than we are
  - For those whose ability to care for themselves is compromised
  - For those who are alone and lonely
  - For those with burdens and needs that are overwhelming
- Once when Jesus was teaching, his family showed up. The story goes like this:

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35)

Truthfully, as you live your life of faith in this world, most people will never know your name. How will you be remembered by them? John was remembered like:

the disciple whom he loved standing nearby ... (John 19:26)

That's a pretty good legacy. One you will find as you DRAW NEAR to the cross.

Amen.