

Who Did Jesus Love?

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on John

The final chapter of John provides an opportunity to reflect not so much on work itself, but on the identity of the worker. The disciples are fishing when they meet Jesus. This is sometimes seen as a bad thing, as if they are fishing when they ought to be preaching the kingdom of God. But there is nothing in the text that suggests disapproval. Rather, Jesus blesses their labor with a miraculous catch. Afterwards, they return to their appointed work as preachers, yet even this reflects only their specific calling and is no slight on fishing as such.

However we take the setting, the impetus of the chapter is the restoration of Peter and the contrast of Peter's future with that of the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). It is a curious thing that the identity of the Beloved Disciple is never revealed in the Fourth Gospel. Most scholars deduce that he is the Apostle John, but the real question is why he shrouds his name in such secrecy. One answer would be that he wishes to distinguish himself from other disciples. He is specially loved by Jesus. But this would be a strange motive in a Gospel permeated with Christ's model of humility and self-sacrifice.

A far better explanation is that he terms himself the "disciple whom Jesus loved" as a way of representing what is true of all disciples. We are all to find our identity first and foremost in the fact that Jesus loves us. When you ask John who he is, he does not answer by giving his name, his family connections, or his occupation. He responds, "I am someone Jesus loves." In the same way, we are to find out who we are, not in what we have done, or in who we know, or in what we have, but in Jesus' love for us.

Yet if Jesus' love for us—or, we may say, the Father's love for us through Jesus—is the source of our identity and motivation for our lives, we work out this love in our activity in God's creation. One crucial aspect of that activity is our daily work. Through God's grace, work can become an arena where we live out our relationship with God and others through loving

service. Our everyday labor, however humble or exalted it may be in others' estimation, becomes the place where God's glory is displayed. By God's grace, as we work, we become living parables of the love and glory of God.