

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 24 April 2022**

Children's Talk: The World Could Not Contain the Books

- What's the longest book you've read?
- How long did it take you to read it?
- How long do you think it would take you to read all of the books that I've got here?
- How about the Kainon School Media Centre or the Westville North Library—how long would it take you to read all of those books?

- Now let's talk about the books that talk about the Lord's life.
 - Do you know what those books are called? (The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).
- They're not short books but they're also not incredibly long.
 - It would take an adult about 8.5 hours to read all four Gospels (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/three-tips-for-better-bible-reading>).
 - That's long but that's not nearly as long as it could have been.

- Listen to what it says at the very end of the Gospel of John, the last of the four Gospels.
 - John 21:24-25 (NKJV)
 - ²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.
 - ²⁵ And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

- It says that the world could not contain all the things that could have been written about what the Lord did.
 - That's like if the whole world were only covered with libraries full of different books—that would still not be enough books to contain it all.
 - Think about it—imagine if you wrote down every single thing that the Lord did and thought and felt in just one day—that would be incredibly long. And the Lord was on earth for thirty-three years.

- So the books we have are actually very, very, very short compared to what they could be and that tells us that the stories that are included in the four Gospels must all be very important and in there for a reason.
 - I don't always know why a certain story or thing that the Lord said is in the Gospels but I trust that it's there for a reason.
 - The Lord could have left it out—like He left out so many other things—but He chose to include that so I need to pay attention to it.

- Another thing this makes me think about is how lucky we are to have any stories about the Lord and what He did.
 - There are plenty of people from the past who lived their whole lives and we don't know anything about them because nobody wrote their story down.
- Aren't we lucky that the Lord made sure that some of the stories were written down for us—not too many so that we would get overwhelmed but enough so that we can know the Lord and have a good relationship with Him. *Amen*.

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
24 April 2022

Intro

- We've been focussing on the Gospel of John—at Christmas at the end of last year and now at Easter.
 - And it is a fascinating book.
 - There's so much in it that is clearly full of meaning.
 - And pretty often I have to accept that I can tell that something cool is going on here and I don't actually know what it is.
 - But occasionally some more light will shine through and it feels like a blessing to get to see something new and beautiful.
- This is definitely true of the last two chapters of the Gospel of John.
 - There are a number of stories about the Lord's interactions with His disciples after He rose from the dead and they are clearly full of meaning and we're only going to scratch the surface.
 - The two disciples that get talked about most in those two chapters are Peter and John.
 - Four years ago when we last focussed on the Gospel of John I preached about Peter (<https://bit.ly/3vDG9f0>) and so this year I want to focus on John.
- So the starting point of this sermon was the text and what I wanted to talk to you about on the Sunday after Easter.
 - But, as I've reflected on the meaning of John, I've found that it's actually quite relevant to what's going on around us at the moment.

The Meaning of John

- I'm not going to hold you in suspense about what exactly John means—we'll get to those passages from the teachings of the New Church in just a second.
- But first I wanted to quickly review how the New Church holds these stories and their meaning.
- The New Church teaches that these stories are based on things that actually happened.
 - There were disciples named Peter and John.
 - They did the things that are described in the stories.
- But that's not the end of it.
 - What they did and said and the way the story is told also have a deeper meaning and significance that goes far beyond those particular individual people.
 - There is a Peter in each of us.
 - There is a John in each of us.
- And when we understand the meaning of these stories in relation to our lives today they can gain all the more significance and relevance.
- Now let's talk about what John means.
- One of the cool things about reading the Lord's Word over years and years is that you start to see the same kinds of things being represented by different characters in different stories throughout the Bible.
 - In the Old Testament Jacob has twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of the Children of Israel.

- And the sequence in which the sons are born and what each of their names mean all is significant.
 - The first three sons that were born were named Reuben, Simeon, and Levi and the teachings of the New Church say that those three sons symbolise the same thing as Peter, James, and John.
 - James was John's brother and Peter, James, and John are often grouped together by the Lord for special or important things.
- *Apocalypse Revealed* §356
 - Reuben, Simeon and Levi in that sequence symbolised truth in the intellect or faith, truth in the will or charity, and truth in practice or good work, like Peter, James and John.
 - The name Reuben has to do with sight and so Reuben—like Peter—symbolises seeing or understanding truth or “truth in the intellect”.
 - The name Simeon has to do with hearing and obeying so Simeon—like James—symbolises truth when it has affected our hearts or “truth in the will”.
 - And the name Levi has to do with joining together so Levi—like John—symbolises truth joining together with love in action or “truth in practice”.
- The teachings of the New Church also call this use—love and wisdom come together in use.
 - It's also called “good works” or “the works of charity”.
 - Here's one passage that uses that terminology and talks a bit about why John represents that.
 - *Secrets of Heaven* §6073:3
 - [C]harity does not actually become charity until it passes into action and becomes a work; for loving someone but not doing anything good for him when the possibility exists is not really loving him. Doing good for him when the possibility exists, and doing it with all one's heart, is loving him; for then the actual deed or work contains all that constitutes charity towards him.
 - [S]ince works are a combination of every aspect of charity and faith present with a person, and since life causes charity to be charity and faith to be faith, and so to be good, John was loved more than the other disciples by the Lord and leaned on His breast at the Last Supper (John 21:20). That disciple represented the good deeds or works of charity....
- In the Gospel of John, the disciple John is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved”.
 - It might seem like a bit of a strange title—didn't Jesus love all of the disciples?
 - But it's because of what John represented.
 - All of the disciples represented various important things in a person and in the church but John represented something particularly close to the Lord's heart.
 - Because when we put our faith and our love into action, *that* is closest to the Lord's heart.

- As further support of the idea that John represents our actions or how we live our lives we can look to the letters that he wrote.
 - In addition to writing the Gospel of John, John also wrote letters which are called the epistles of John.
 - In 1 John 3 we find John writing about just how important our actions are.
 - 1 John 3:10-11, 16-18 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another....
 - ¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?
 - ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.
- It's all very well to have faith or have warm feelings in our hearts; those things need to manifest in how we live our lives.
- That's enough set up.
 - Now let's look at how Peter and John interact in the stories after the Lord's resurrection and see what we can learn from them about the interaction of faith and works, or truth in the intellect and truth in practice.

How John and Peter Interact

- On Easter morning, as it's told in the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb when it's still dark and she finds the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb and so she runs and tells Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved.
- We'll pick up the story here and pay attention to how it goes back and forth as to which one is taking the lead.
 - John 20:3-8 (NKJV)
 - ³ Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. ⁴ So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. ⁵ And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.
- Peter goes out and the other disciple.
- They both run to the tomb but the disciple who represents taking action gets there first.
- But it is the disciple who represents faith who actually goes inside the tomb and has a look around at everything.
 - And only once faith has had a look around does the works of charity disciple go in too.

- But faith does not seem to believe right away—faith is still trying to figure out what has happened.
- But good works “saw and believed”.
- We could spend a lot of time going through the ins and outs of this.
 - There are a lot of teaching in the New Church about the exact interaction between faith, charity, and good works.
 - But one of the basic things we can see depicted here is that mere faith is not sufficient.
 - Coming to a place of belief and trust in the Lord is not a merely intellectual exercise.
 - It is not just a matter of collecting enough pieces of knowledge and spending enough time thinking about them and trying to arrange them just right.
 - We gain real faith and belief when we take action.
 - We need to investigate things intellectually—Peter has an important role to play in this story and in our story—but it’s not just about Peter.
- We can see a similar back and forth between Peter and John in another story from this time—the story of the disciples going out fishing.
 - It’s Peter who leads the charge on going fishing and the other disciples agree and follow along.
 - Then they fish all night and catch nothing.
 - Then, in the morning, Jesus talks to them from the shore (though they don’t yet realise that it’s Him), and He tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they do and suddenly they can’t bring the net into the boat because there are so many fish in it.
 - At that point John realises who it is on the shore.
 - John 21:7-8 (NKJV)
 - ⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.
 - So it’s John who realises that it’s the Lord before Peter.
 - But then Peter takes the plunge to get to the Lord as soon as possible, while the other disciples do the work to bring the catch to land.
 - I’m not sure what it all means but it is cool.

Application

- This is fun to understand but let’s not stop at just understanding this, let’s push towards how we might use or apply these ideas.
 - We’ll talk about some examples but before we get to that it’s important to realise that John, or truth in practice, or the works of charity are not just about the good and nice things that we do: they’re also about not doing bad things.
 - That is an equally important part of the truth we know coming into our actions.
 - John’s epistle talked about that we can tell if someone is a child of God or a child of the devil based on whether they live righteously or do not.
- This connects us back to another person named John: John the Baptist.

- John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord and He was also all about actions but his focus was on getting people to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8).
- John the Baptist and John the disciple whom Jesus loved seem like quite different people but they are connected in their focus on the importance of how we live our lives.
 - They seem to relate to what the teachings of the New Church call the first and second thing of charity.
 - *True Christianity* §435
 - The leading role in teachings about charity is played by this statement, that The first thing is not to do evil to our neighbour, the second is to do good to our neighbour.
 - The goal is to serve and do loving things for our neighbour but we have to start by not doing evil to our neighbour.
 - The truth of this is easy to see when we get to examples.

Helping the People Affected by the Floods

- The example of serving the neighbour that’s been on my mind this week—and probably on all of your minds too—is trying to figure out how to help people affected by the flooding and landslides.
 - Last week was when the floods happened but this week has been when the real extent of the destruction and loss of life has become clear.
 - We’ve probably all seen lots of really terrible photos and videos on our phones and computers but also just in our own neighbourhoods.
 - And then there are the stories.
 - So many tragic, unbelievable stories.
 - Too much sadness to hold.
- And so we want to help, we want to try to do something.
 - We want to take action.
 - And that’s great and it’s part of how we can find belief in the Lord and goodness and find some hope again in the midst of this tragedy when we see people showing up for their neighbours in little and big ways.
 - John believes; John says, “It is the Lord.”
 - But we don’t just need action we also desperately need Peter.
 - We need facts, and knowledge, and people who really understand how to help.
 - How to drive earth moving machinery; how to assess whether a house is safe to live in; how to rebuild roads and buildings; how best to help communities of people who have lost everything.
 - We need Peter to go in and take a proper look around.
 - Then John can take action that will actually help.
 - And we desperately need people to do the first of charity of not doing evil to their neighbour.
 - You’ve probably heard the stories of people being accused of trying to steal some of what was donated.
 - Or of people trying to use those supplies to serve their own political needs.
 - I don’t know what the truth is in those situations but it’s so clear that those selfish tendencies have to be shunned.
 - The good actions are spoiled and corrupted if people are using the situation to serve their own selfish purposes.

- And think of how much more quickly and easily our community could recover from this if we knew with absolute certainty that everything donated or paid for by government was going to be used appropriately.
- If we can see it clearly in a situation like this, that should help us to see how much it matters that we also clean up our act.
 - I'm sure we're all doing lots of good and useful things.
 - But are there people that we are mistreating in the process?
 - Are there ways in which we are being dishonest?
 - Are there things that we are saying or doing that are causing harm?

What Will Last?

- The other application that I want to talk about is a bit of a leap from what we've been talking about.
- It's connected with something from right at the end of the Gospel of John.
- There's a whole fascinating conversation that Jesus has with Peter that we're skipping over.
- But at the end of that conversation John starts coming towards them and Peter asks Jesus about John.
 - John 21:20-23 (NKJV)
 - ²⁰ Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper.... ²¹ Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?"
 - ²² Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."
 - ²³ Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"
- I had no idea what to do with this part of the story.
 - It comes right before the comment that we talked about in the Children's Talk about how many books could have been written about all the things that the Lord did.
 - And I honestly didn't know why this particular detail made the cut—especially the bit about the disciples misunderstanding what Jesus meant about John remaining until Jesus comes.
 - Why is that included?
 - And the teachings of the New Church don't comment on it.
 - But I was talking to my dad about it and he said, "One of the things it makes me wonder about is how we cling to our institutions and we don't want the institution to die and fade away but really the key thing is charity. Love to the Lord and charity—that's what's not going to die until the Lord comes!"
 - We all get to be involved in doing good things.
 - Maybe you have been part of this church congregation for a while and you've helped to keep it going.
 - Or maybe you've been very involved in Kainon School.
 - Or maybe you've been involved in some other charitable organisation.
 - Or maybe you've helped to build a business.

- Or maybe you've been a mom to some children.
- And we can get very invested in these uses that we are serving.
 - But sometimes these institutions come to an end.
 - Or our time of having a role in a particular use comes to an end, like when someone's children grow up and move out or when a person gets old and retires.
- The Lord wasn't saying that the person John would live on earth forever—He wasn't saying that that particular human body would keep living until the Lord came.
 - The Lord was saying that what John *represented* would last forever.
 - In the same way, the Lord doesn't promise that New Church Westville or Kainon School or your business will definitely last forever.
 - But He does promise that the *uses* served by those institutions will continue to need to be served for forever.
 - Our focus should not be on just preserving the institutions but rather the point is to be serving the use of helping people gather to worship the Lord, or serving the use of educating children, or serving the use of whatever use your business serves.
 - That's the point; that's the thing that will last forever; that's John.

Conclusion

- One last thought to wrap this up.
- There's Peter in these stories and there's John.
- And it doesn't work if we just have one of them.
 - Just having faith and knowledge and the truth isn't enough.
 - And just having action isn't enough either.
 - It's not as simple as "Just do it."
- But there's also another key character in all of these stories who is rather essential—the Lord.
 - He's the one who called these disciples in the first place; He's the one who really understands each of them and their strengths and weaknesses; and He's the one who can keep them both on the right track.
 - In the last few verses of the Gospel of John Jesus says to Peter and then says to John, "Follow Me" (John 21:19, 22).
 - [In verse 22 it looks like Jesus is talking to Peter but the teachings of the New Church clarify that in the first part of the verse He is talking to Peter but then He says, "Follow Me," to John (*Apocalypse Explained* §785:5, *New Jerusalem* §122).]
- Some of us are going to be more like Peter and some of us are going to be more like John but hopefully we can realise that we need each other and that we can work together to follow the Lord in faith, love, and action.
- Amen.