

Homily for the Friday in the Seventh Week of Easter

May 29, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 25:13–21; Psalm 103:1–6; John 21:1–14**

Today and tomorrow our gospel lessons together are what we know as the last chapter of John, chapter 21, widely regarded as an appendix, or an epilogue, to the first twenty chapters. The gospel seems to end with these words of Risen Jesus to Thomas and the others, “ ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”¹

The next words of the gospel are the beginning of our lesson today, “After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he revealed himself in this way.”² Frances Moloney, in his commentary on this gospel, writes, “to the best of our knowledge there has never been a textual tradition that did not contain John 21.”³ In her book, *Written That*

¹ John 20:29–31.

² John 21:1.

³ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 546.

You May Believe, Sandra Schneiders writes, “Chapter 21 is an integral part of the Gospel . . . and its purpose is to close by transferring the reader’s attention from the experience of . . . those who ‘saw’ to the story of those who ‘believe without having seen.’ ”⁴

Mary Magdalene was not the unnamed disciple whom we know only as the disciple whom Jesus loved. We meet that disciple at the supper before Passover, he is “lying next to the breast of Jesus.”⁵ In John, he is with the mother of Jesus while Jesus is being crucified. To his mother Jesus says, “ ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ . . . to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ ”⁶

On the morning of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene runs to tell Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved that the tomb is open and empty. They run to the tomb. The disciple Jesus loved gets there first but does not go in until Simon Peter has already gone in and seen the cloths that had covered the crucified body and the cloth that had covered Jesus’ face. The evangelist tells us, that when the unnamed disciple goes in, “He saw and believed.”⁷

⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 224.

⁵ John 13:23.

⁶ John 19:26–27.

⁷ John 20:7.

So today there are seven disciples, not twelve, a not unimportant detail in the gospel in which every believer has a direct, intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and a command from Jesus to love others. In today's lesson, of course the disciple whom Jesus loved recognizes that it is the Lord who has spoken to them. This disciple seems to have more than his eyesight to guide him. Professor Schneiders writes that believers have "the eye of 'inner vision' . . . faith itself."⁸

I grabbed another of her books off my shelf, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*. My notes on the inside cover bought me to these words, "Prayer to Jesus is an address to a person who is truly alive and available to the baptized believer."⁹

Reading these words brought to my mind a hymn from my childhood and teenage years, one that I can't remember singing since I became an Episcopalian. The words I know are from the *Baptist Hymnal*: "Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Break me, melt me, mold me,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 30.

fill me. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.”¹⁰
The text and the tune, which I will not sing, were written by a Presbyterian minister, Donald Iverson, originally from Georgia. In the winter of 1926, he heard a sermon on the Holy Spirit during a crusade while in Orlando. Afterwards, he went to the First Presbyterian Church there and wrote the words and the tune. Born in 1890, he died in 1977.¹¹

God is never absent from us. Spirit of the living God,
fall fresh on us every day.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹⁰ *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956), Hymn 523.

¹¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-spirit-of-the-living-god>, (accessed 29 May 2020).