

Our Parish Patron: St John the Apostle and Evangelist

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

John, Apostle and Evangelist – Patron of this Parish

Let's spend some time wondering together – let's wonder how the choice of St John as our patron has shaped this parish over our hundred and eighty years.

John's original Hebrew name is יוחנן (Yochanan). It means 'God is gracious' – 'God gives undeserved gifts'. That's quite a name to live up to. John's titles tell a story too. An *Apostle* is someone who's sent out on a mission. And an *Evangelist* is someone who brings good news to people who need it. So all together, John, Apostle and Evangelist means three qualities; *gracious*, *committed* and *uplifting*. That's what our name challenges us both to be and to continue to become; the Parish of the gracious, the committed and the uplifting. Let's wonder about those challenges for a little while.

First, our name – St John's. It calls us to be a community of *God's Grace*. Grace is the name of the sort of generosity that gives without being asked for something; grace gives without worrying whether someone is worthy to receive; grace gives without worrying whether they can return the favour. Is this a characteristic of our community of St John – the Grace of God? Is that us? Is that who we are becoming? Yes, I believe it is. I keep on hearing about quiet acts of generosity here that make me very glad.

John's first title is *Apostle*; which means sent on a mission. Are we a sending community? Do we know what our mission is? Every week, our worship ends with the dismissal – the sending out; *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*. Where do we go out and how do we love and serve the Lord?

Jesus's parable of the last judgement ^{Mt 25.31-40} answers that question; *Truly I tell you, whatever you have done for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done for me.* That's how we love and serve the Lord.

Do we send one another out and support each other in carrying out our mission? Do we feel equipped by this community to do this – to go out from here, to be sensitive to needs and to respond to them with loving service?

Do we hear Christ's call to go with him to love and serve the world he came to save? And is this gathering a home base that we missionaries can rely on – where we can be refreshed and strengthened to go out again? Is that us? Is that who we are becoming? Again, yes, I believe it is. There is in this community an active commitment to serve justice and compassion in the world.

And *Evangelist* – which means a bearer of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In this world where the word *news* is almost always heard to mean *bad news*, are we offering the Good News; Good News which reveals the healer to the broken, the shepherd to the lost, living water to the thirsty and the bread of life to the hungry? Is that us? Is that who we are becoming? Once again, I believe it is.

We are on the journey together – learning how to be Christ-followers according to the pattern we've learnt from our patron, St John, Apostle and Evangelist. These questions of mission and evangelism we've just been wondering about are pivotal questions for us this year; the year when we've just begun work on re-appraising what our mission is as a parish over the coming years and decades.

Today, we take the chance to consider particularly the guidance and wisdom we might glean from St John. As it happens, since we are observing John's feast in May rather than December, we've already spent quite a bit of time reading

his gospel over the Lenten and Easter seasons. So it's still fresh in our memories. Let's think back to two of the moments we've shared in John's Gospel recently.

On Maundy Thursday, we heard the New Commandment which we find only in John's Gospel: ^{13.34-35} *A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* John treasured this moment and recorded it for us. It's a central emphasis of John's that mutual love is *the* most important means by which we proclaim life in Christ. So the implicit question to us is, do we work together to embody that mutual love? Is that us? Is that who we are becoming? Yes, I believe we're definitely on that trajectory.

On Good Friday, we were gathered at another moment where that central value of mutual love shone out. It was when Jesus, on the cross, gave his mother, Mary and the beloved disciple, John into each other's care. ^{19.26-27} *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' ²⁷ and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'* From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Mutual love is something I find here in abundance. I find it in the many practical ways you in this parish family express care for each other. I also find it in the commitment we offer to marginalised people – to all who come among us, and also to these dear ones in this part of Adelaide and way beyond.

St John has made sure we will know what taking his name means. Our challenge is to ponder what more that calls from us. I pray that over the generations – as well as now – we who are called by his name will continue on the journey of growing and sharing a Christian faith modelled by our patron John, Apostle and Evangelist – *gracious, committed and uplifting.*

So you and I who are named gracious, committed and uplifting,
like John, let's accept Christ's sending, and continue to
proclaim our discipleship by growing in mutual love for each
other and for all to whom Christ sends us. Amen