

In the Spirit of Another John

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In a previous article, I addressed Saint John the Baptist and his role as a Masonic figure, and what Lodges might draw from that dedication. In that article, I left Saint John the Evangelist to later discussion. I must now confess I left Saint John the Evangelist because of my own frustration – whereas Saint John the Baptist had a clear identity, the identity of Saint John the Evangelist is awkward and confusing, with many (sometimes strange) scholarly theories.

In the Christian tradition, Saint John the Evangelist is portrayed as a very impressive person who left a deep impression in the New Testament. Saint John is simultaneously identified as the author of the Gospel of John (“the Evangelist”), the Johanne Letters (“the Apostle”), and Revelation (“the Revelator”), and a personal witness to the ministry of Jesus and the passion of the Christ (“the Beloved Disciple”). This portrays John as the key New Testament prophet, complimenting Saint John the Baptist’s role as the last Old Testament prophet. It’s therefore unsurprising that Masonry, having deep roots in the Christian tradition, might choose to conflate them and dedicate itself to both characters simultaneously.

Some modern scholar, however, see three distinct “Johns”: John the Revelator, John the Apostle (called “the Presbyter”), and another who is both John the Evangelist and John the Beloved Disciple. This final figure – the Beloved Disciple of Christ, and the author of the Gospel and first Johanne epistle – is the one I like to remember when the Lodge is opened. I would like to address here John the Beloved Disciple of Christ, with every intention to address John the Evangelist another time.

As told in the Gospel stories, John the Beloved Disciple was a person of labor – a man from a fishing family on the Sea of Gallilee. He was gathered into service with the first Disciples when Jesus walked along the shores of the Sea and calling, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” John was said to have joined him immediately, and to great reward: John is noted at the most profound moments in Christianity, including the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, and the Empty Tomb. John was called at the start of Jesus’s ministry, was the only Disciple to see the Crucifixion of the Christ, and was one of two Disciples who saw the Empty Tomb, singling him out among even among his prestigious brethren.

From this example, the Mason can learn to accept the truth of the Grand Architect, even when that truth causes him to have to change his life. Like John the Beloved Disciple, we should move quickly when faith calls us, even when it calls us into a new, mysterious, and uncertain future. In doing so, we deepen our lives and the lives of those around us, and we put ourselves into positions where we can have yet deeper and more profound experiences of that truth. We truly make ourselves a servant to that which is good when we accept the call to serve as it demands; we weaken ourselves and shallow our lives when hear that call yet cling to our worldly preoccupations.

In the model character of Saint John the Beloved Disciple, may we be open to that call.