

Jesus and John the disciple whom Jesus loved John 19:16-27

Question: In text language what does BF and BFF stand for?

Today we will take a look at the human being who perhaps became the closest to being called Jesus' BFE, a new text term for Best Friend on Earth, John, the disciple whom he loved. One whose life was transformed from a 'Son of Thunder' into Christ's 'apostle of love', by way of his spiritual journey with Jesus which led them together to the cross at the place of the skull, Golgotha where Jesus was crucified and died.

In the hours leading up to this event while the other disciples, except Peter fled away from Jesus as the mob arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane, the apostle John would also attempt to stay close in order to be at his side [this is real BFE stuff], go on to be given the responsibility to care for Jesus' mother, and then later become a fully fledged witness to his death and resurrection as the Christ, the risen and living Messiah, Saviour and Son of God. So together now as a part of our Lenten series let's learn more about John's journey of friendship with Jesus and the spiritual transformation that took place within that ongoing relationship and just how their stories cross over and are relevant to our lives today.

Before following Jesus, John had been a disciple of John the Baptist. Two men were following John when he pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God; one was Andrew, the brother of Simon-Peter, while the other was presumably John (John 1:35-40). These two and their families were connected before this. John was from Galilee. He was the son of a fisherman named Zebedee, and the brother of James. It seems he grew up as a hard working and well off member of his family business. The family owned and ran a thriving fishing venture so prosperous that they hired a number of men to work in the business. It was at while at work that John and his brother were mending their fishing nets with their father beside the Sea of Galilee when Jesus arrived on the scene and called them: "When he had gone a little farther, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat and followed him" (Mark 1:16-20) joining Simon and Andrew who John and James were close to because they were in business together according to Luke 5:9-10 which says "Peter and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners".

And then they all head off together to Capernaum where their teaching and training with Jesus begins in the Synagogue on the Sabbath after which they went to the home of Simon and Andrew" to receive hospitality and continue the ministry with Jesus. (Mark 1:29). John and Simon-Peter were well off and well connected to one another which leads me to why there is a Catholic Franciscan developed belief that this prosperous fishing business partnership maintained a Zebedee directed branch office in Jerusalem along with a house in the city. In fact stones and arches of that house are still standing today, and were used by an early Christian church. Zebedee's side of the business it would seem included supplying fish to the family of the High Priest, another indication of its prosperity and the fact that John and his family were known to the High Priest and his court. Because it was John who went with Peter to the courtyard of the High Priest's house after Jesus' arrest: "Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in" (John 18:15-16). So John was both well off and what we would call through the family business well-connected, but not just to the high priest. There may be evidence that John was related to Jesus by birth. Scholars have identified the person Salome (Mark 15:41) as the sister of Jesus' mother and the mother of Zebedee's sons. If this is so, then James and John were Jesus' cousins.

So we have in John the Apostle a man who was one of Jesus' first followers, a hardworking well off fisherman with high connections as he was known to the High Priest. This background as the disciple whom Jesus loved would be important in his life's journey of spiritual transformation.

To stop at this point and now relate our own story to John and Jesus we can ask ourselves, "When did I begin following Jesus?" "Who led me to him?" along with, "What was I like then?" Which are important questions when we consider just how did a "son of thunder" become the "disciple whom Jesus loved"?

Jesus named John and James *Boanerges*, "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). The nickname it would seem was well deserved for they were young men of great ambition, who even went as far as directly requesting the two top places in Jesus' coming Kingdom which when the rest of the disciples heard about this they were annoyed and became angry. (Mark 10:35-45).

Not only was John full of self ambition but along with his brother, he too like the rest of the disciples could be given to anger and even what might be a violent temper as recorded in Luke 9:51-56.

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.”

To selfish ambition, anger and violence we can also add intolerance to John personal traits as well: "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his Reward." (Mark 9:38-41).

But John was not to stay this way the more time he spent with Jesus. On his as journey of spiritual transformation to the cross Jesus changed this angry, ambitious, intolerant youth into the man known to Christian history as the "apostle of love." Here's what we know about the unnamed Beloved Disciple of the Fourth Gospel. At the Last Supper, he reclined against Jesus' breast, so that he was seated at the Lord's right hand John 13:21. This was a position of the greatest honor, usually reserved for the host's closest friend. And to his closest friend [BFE] Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to the Beloved Disciple: Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:25-27).

Jesus' death was not to the end of this transforming relationship. It was the Beloved Disciple who arrived first at the tomb on Easter Sunday morning: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the

entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead) (John 20:1-9).

And of course the Beloved Disciple was also present at the lakeside of Galilee when the risen Christ appeared to his followers where Jesus had a special word for him (John 21:20-24). From this moment on John would go on to serve the one he loved in ways that would change human history. The Beloved Disciple in John's Gospel is its author who in humility chose not to name himself, such was his witness and an example for us today.

How did John change the world? Well, after Jesus' resurrection, he became one of the most significant figures in Christian history. He was present when the lame man was healed beside the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3) and was imprisoned with Peter (Acts 4:1-22). He went with Peter to Samaria to see the results of Philip's preaching there (Acts 8:14). And Paul named him one of the great leaders of the Christian church: "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews" (Galatians 2:9).

Tradition indicates that he pastored in Ephesus, where he cared for Mary until she died. He then journeyed to Rome where perhaps in response to his growing stature, he was banished to the island of Patmos as written in Revelation 1:9 and attested to by the historian Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* "the apostle and evangelist John, who was yet living, in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos". After Patmos he supposedly returned to Ephesus, where he ministered until his death. Several stories have been told about this last chapter of his ministry:

Clement of Alexandria says that John singled out a young man in a particular congregation and entrusted him to the bishop as a future leader in the church. But the young man fell in with robbers and became their leader. Clement describes him as "the most violent, the most blood-thirsty, the most cruel." Some years later, John revisited the church and asked about the young man. Told what had happened to him, John went after him. He found the robber leader; the man turned in shame and fled from his presence. John managed to chase him down and then asked, "Why, my son, do you flee from me, your father, unarmed, old? Son, pity me. Fear not; you still have hope of life. I will give account to Christ for you. If need be, I will willingly endure your death, as the Lord died for us. For you young man I will surrender my life. But first of all, you need to Stand and believe that Christ has sent me." So the young man threw away his weapons in repentance, left his criminal gang and returned to the church where he eventually became the bishop as John foresaw of that congregation.

Another of the church father's, Jerome, adds this remarkable story from the very end of John's earthly life. As John lived on in Ephesus to an old age, and could only with difficulty be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples, he was unable to give utterance to many words, he used to say no more at their several meetings than this: "Little children, love one another." At length the disciples and fathers who were there, wearied with always hearing the same words, said: "Master, why do you always say this?" "It is the Lord's command" was his reply, "and, if this alone be done, it is enough".

When John wrote his Gospel he used the Greek word for "truth" 25 times, and then 20 times in his epistles. He used the word for "witness" nearly 70 times. But he used the word for "love" more than 80 times. What became the spiritually transformed and life changing message of John is here: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:7-12).

Hence it was the risen Christ who transformed a "son of thunder", a hard working, well-off and well connected, highly ambitious, intolerant, angry and even violent tempered young man, into someone who would write later with humility in their own words, not just that he knew and believed in Jesus, but that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved, his best and closest friend on earth who was transformed by that relationship after Christ's resurrection into the "apostle of love." One who would spend the rest of his life serving Christ with this message which has the power to change the world, to change even you and me today into being best friends with Jesus too, in close continual committed relationship with him following and obediently serving in a spirit of love.

This is the challenge that remains with us today, to ask ourselves the question, "Will I allow Jesus Christ into my life to love me and transform me by his spirit today?" Will You?

And then on that continual journey of spiritual transformation with the risen and living Jesus Christ will you lovingly be a witness of the change that Christ has made in you to the world for the rest of your life?