

# Learning More about the New Testament

## St James' Episcopal Church

### Chapter 9: Johannine Literature     Learning Group Discussion: 2/19-2/25

#### **Reading Assignment Outline**

##### **A church divided: the letters**

Author: the "Elder," maybe author of Gospel

Date: maybe 100CE, maybe earlier (author) or later (historical/communal prayer)

Context: three-letter packet to the same divided Johannine church

cause of division is disputed understanding of Christ

not clear about specific aspect of Christ that was at issues, maybe his full humanity

author first insists on God's transcendence, God is a mystery

God is known above all in love: "God is love"

such love does not arise from human instinct, but is learned by the community from the love

God showed in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:7-16)

the love of God must be expressed through love of others (1 John 4:20-21)

##### **Jesus reveals God: the Fourth Gospel**

Author: John, the son of Zebedee and one of the Twelve, or a disciple of John

Date: maybe 90CE

Context: maybe Ephesus, Roman persecution

conflict between Christians and Jews, between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians

differences with Synoptic Gospels:

- facts of Jesus' ministry

- character of Jesus' ministry

- Jesus speaks differently

- John is more explicit about Jesus' identity; Synoptics are more implicit

##### **Heavens opened: Revelation**

Author: may have been a Palestinian Jewish Christian who fled to the Diaspora

Date: 64-70CE or 81-96CE

Context: word "revelation" is in Greek "apocalypse," a term that denotes the disclosure of realities previously hidden

apocalyptic is a form of resistance literature for those who experience themselves as marginalized or oppressed

complex imagery but simple message – God is in charge, history is in God's hands

God's fundamental victory of evil and death has already been won, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

encourages Christians not to do violence against forces of evil but to resist by refusing to acknowledge their authority

Christians do not recognize the emperor as supreme; there is only one Lord

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What message in the Johannine letters speaks to you the strongest?
2. How would you compare the Synoptics with John's Gospel?
3. What is your reaction to the imagery of Revelation?

#### **Scripture Passage and Prayer**

**1 John 4:7-16**