

Introduction for Richard Burridge

The Gospel according to St John is, by common consent, one of the most inexhaustibly fertile Biblical texts. Generation after generation, some of the greatest Christian minds have explored their theological commitments through meditation on this book. For myself, the theme that most clearly comes across in its pages is this: we are told right at the start that the eternal Word who becomes flesh in Jesus exists ‘in the bosom of the Father’ – next to the Father’s heart, as some have translated it; and from then on, the gospel relates how by relation with Jesus we may come to see ‘where he lives’ – like the first apostles’ – and to make our home there.

But that journey to the Father’s heart through Jesus Christ is a journey to and through the cross, where Jesus is lifted up for the world to see and his glory is displayed in the deepest weakness and apparent defeat. The follower of Jesus, called to be where Jesus is, in his glory, walks towards his cross.

The ministry of any Christian pastor, but perhaps especially the ministry of the bishop, who is charged with calling the Church together in Jesus’ Name and Spirit, is about leading human beings home to the Father’s heart. And so the minister must become at home there, must learn what it is to be where Jesus is, ‘abiding’ with and in him, finding the glory in the struggle and apparent failure. It is a message that a wounded and struggling Church needs to hear, and that we as bishops need to absorb ever more deeply.

The commentary that is being offered for reflection is one of the finest and most accessible of modern studies, looking not at individual verses in isolation but at the narrative pattern of each chapter and of the gospel as a whole. It is designed to help us be drawn into the flow of Jesus’ life as St John records it, so that our stories are caught up in that of Our Lord.

I am deeply grateful to Richard Burridge for allowing us to use his work in this way. We are also much indebted to the Bible Reading Fellowship for their partnership in issuing this special edition of the commentary.

May these pages open up for you the Good News of God’s living and everlasting Word, made flesh for our life and salvation.

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