

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

“...recorded that you may believe
that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God”. (*John 20:31*)

The FOURTH GOSPEL in the **LITURGY FOR SUNDAYS & FEASTS**

- Over the three year cycle, John is read 11 times in A; 19 times in B; 11 in C.
- In all three years, John appears in Lent, Easter, Christmas Day Mass, and 2nd Ordinary Sunday.
- In Year B: John makes up for a lack of Marcan passages; 3 Advent, Ordinary Sundays 17-21, Christ the King.
- John supplies the dramatic Passion Narrative for Good Friday; the figures of Peter, Pilate, the Beloved Disciple are particularly well developed here. No Simon of Cyrene here.
- Almost all of the gospel is covered over the three years.
- We can detect a simple plan in the themes it presents.

The FOURTH GOSPEL in the LITURGY FOR SUNDAYS & FEASTS

- For many - not least preachers - the simplicity of the fourth gospel, along with its profundity, might make it the most difficult to preach on, e.g. John 6 in the summer of year B!
- There is a simple plan, constantly repeated, providing a useful handle for understanding John.
- This is a three-fold faith development of individuals on encountering Jesus, repeated throughout the gospel.
- This is coupled with opposition to that which Jesus offers – “the Jews”, disciples, Pilate, etc.

A PRE-AMBLE after a PROLOGUE

- John 1:1-18, the Prologue, contains the substance of the gospel: the creative Word of God, made flesh, announced by the Baptist; rejected by 'his own', but giving eternal life to all who accept him.
- Next (1:19-4:54), themes from the rest of the gospel.
- Following the prologue, people are drawn to Jesus. Initially, John points to Jesus for the crowds, and then for his own disciples. Then, disciples tell others what they have seen.
- Those who encounter Jesus are challenged to leave behind disbelief, and then also their partial belief.

NATHANIEL – ideal Israelite, poor disciple!

- The three-fold faith story (1:45-51)
 - Philip draws Nathaniel's attention to Jesus.
 - Agnostic Nathaniel: 'can any good come from Nazareth?'
 - Nathaniel's faith is awakened when Jesus says "I saw you under the fig tree"; Nathaniel says "Rabbi, you are the Son of God" – Nathaniel creates a faith-world he can cope with.
 - But Jesus challenges him to more: "you will see above the Son of Man angels ascending and descending."
 - Much later, Jesus will say, "I am going to prepare for you a place in my Father's home" (c.f. John 14:2-3).

From Cana to...Cana: moving to faith (O.D.R.)

- Older commentaries on John point to a “first week” from John 1:19- 2:11. Evidence: ‘the following day...the next day...etc.
- Unconvincing: ½ the week missing (3 days later... 2:1)
- More convincing, an episode from 2:1 – 4:54 includes the 1st and 2nd signs, both at Cana, and both illustrate the issues of the Nathaniel episode – 3 stages of faith – Nicodemus, the Baptist’s last witness (3:22-36), Samaritan woman, nobleman & his son.
- The ‘3 days later’ of 2:1 is still important, as we see in the cleansing of the Temple (2:13-45).

NICODEMUS (Ch 3)

- Nicodemus comes to Jesus by NIGHT (darkness, unbelief, etc.), but he comes into the LIGHT (Jesus).
- Nicodemus creates his own world of belief – at least he tries to: “how can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb? (3:4)
- Jesus challenges Nicodemus to the things of heaven; “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life” (3:16), and; “but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light” (3:21). Later, Pilate cynically rejects truth (18:38)

The SAMARITAN WOMAN (Ch 4)

A grim start to a story – a woman alone at noon, collecting water; 6 partners, including 5 husbands – 6 indicating symbolic failure or inadequacy (c.f. water jars at Cana), suggesting multiple futile searches for a meaningful life?

- She does not believe Jesus, without a bucket, can improve on what she has (a well shared by humans and animals).
- Partial belief; “I see you are a prophet”, but according to her own perspectives.
- The woman may not have reached faith: she “wonders if he is the Christ” (4:29), but the townspeople believe because they “have seen for themselves, and believe Jesus really is the saviour of the world (4:42)

5000 hungry people are fed (Ch 6)

Complex: some disciples believe; others leave. Passover setting, leading to Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life.

- a. The Twelve. Philip sees no real solution. “200 denarii would give only a small piece each” (6:7). Andrew offers a solution within his grasp (partial belief), “there is a boy here...” (6:9). Finally, Peter: “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe.” (6:68f).
- b. Jews/disciples. These move from partial belief- they wanted to make him king; to a desire to ‘bring Jesus under control’ “when did you come here?” (6:25), to a retreat back to their own history, ‘our ancestors’ (6:31), and on to a total rejection “This is intolerable language!” (6:60 ff)

A man born blind sees – 'seeing' people become blind (Ch. 9)

Another complex situation.

- **1. A man born blind** Moves from darkness to light, in stages of comprehension, “tell me where the Son of Man is that I might believe in him” (9:36). “Lord, I believe” (9:38). Interestingly, the man of partial belief can still teach the cynical authorities, much to their annoyance.
- **2. The authorities** Outright rejection of Jesus’ works “We are disciples of Moses” (9:28)
- **3. The man’s parents** A desire to hide in the shadows: “he is old enough; ask him.” (9:23)

Lazarus – or his sister(s) (Ch 11)

Lazarus scarcely matters in this story – he doesn't utter a word! Who comes alive? Arguably, Martha (& Mary).

- Step 1. Both sisters: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (11:21. 32)
- Step 2. Limited belief: “I know he will rise at the resurrection on the last day” (11:24)
- Step 3. Faith. “I believe that you are the Christ, the one who was to come into the world” (11:27).
- And to prove the point, Lazarus is ordered from his tomb, and they unbind him and let him go free (11:44); unlike Jesus, who will free himself.

JESUS: the true meaning of the Jewish Temple Feasts

- John refers to 3 major Jewish feasts: Passover (3 times: 2:13; 6:4; 13:1), Tabernacles (7:2), Dedication [Hanukkah](10:22).
- Passover: recalling Israel passing from death (Egypt) to life (Promised land). ["I am the bread of life" 6:48]
- Tabernacles: associated with Exodus, and was the occasion for the installation of the ark of the Covenant in Solomon's Temple. Rituals include lighting of lamps ["I am the light of the world" 8:12], and on the final day, libations ["If any man thirsts let him come to me" 7:37]
- Dedication: re-dedication of the desecrated temple, (e.g. I Macc 1:29–64). [Jesus does his Father's work 10:22-39].

MARY MAGDALENE; 1st witness to the Resurrection. (20:11-18)

- **Step 1.** Initial disbelief; “They have taken my Lord away and I do not know where they have taken him” (20:13) – she thought Jesus was the gardener;. (20:15)
- **Step 2.** Partial belief; “Rabbuni”. Belief within her own terms; Jesus has to say “do not cling to me”.
- **Step 3.** Total faith – Mary tells the other she has seen the Lord (20:18)
- Notice that seeing the Risen Jesus does little to promote faith. In each of the stories we have examined, faith comes through hearing his voice.

THOMAS – doubt or faith? (20:19-29)

Thomas presumably represents all the disciples here.

- Step 1. Disbelief. “They were behind closed doors in fear”. (20:19). Clearly, they do not believe that Jesus has risen.
- Step 2. Partial Belief. Thomas will only believe when he has evidence – he demands an inquest (20:24).
- Step 3. Complete belief. The highest profession of faith in the NT – without Thomas’ inquest! (20:28)

The BELOVED DISCIPLE (part I)

This figure appears AFTER the “Book of Signs” in John (ch 13 onwards) Was he a son of Zebedee, or someone else?

- But note that Zebedee’s sons, are mentioned in 21:2.
- He first appears in 13:23, at the Last Supper, when Jesus predicts one of them will betray him.
- Next, in 18:15-16. “Another” disciple is able to witness Jesus’ trial while Peter is outside denying all knowledge.
- Then at the foot of the cross with Jesus’ mother (19:26-27)
- And finally at the empty tomb (20:1-8), and in Galilee when the disciples have returned to fishing (ch 21). WITNESS.

The BELOVED DISCIPLE (part 2)

- So, who was he? Tradition has it that he was the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, but if so, why is he not identified as such in chs 13-21?
- A disciple who was not one of the Twelve, but who was at the Last Supper? Possibly; Luke describes disciples at this, the word he uses for the 70 or 72.
- This disciple seems to have Jerusalem contacts with people in high places(see 18:16).
- To the “people of the 4th Gospel”, he appears as the true disciple, who was at the foot of the cross with Mary, the other ideal disciple, and who believed. The ‘author’ of the gospel, in the sense that he originated that tradition?

The BELOVED DISCIPLE (part 3)

- THE BELOVED DISCIPLE at the tomb.
- Step 1. Disbelief. Mary's word does not make them believe.
- Step 2. Peter carries out an investigation; he sifts the evidence looking for clues.
- Step 3. The beloved disciple goes in and sees the cloths rolled up (unlike Lazarus', which he was still wearing). It is as if in seeing these, the beloved disciple remembers the WORDS OF SCRIPTURE, that he must rise, and he believes. (20:9)

The BELOVED DISCIPLE (part 4)

Beside the Sea of Galilee

- Step 1. A return to fishing (21:3)
- Step 2. “They did not know it was Jesus” (21:4)
- Step 3. The beloved disciple; “it is the Lord”. The others; “they knew it was the Lord” (21:12)

As a footnote: does the final episode suggest that the Johanine community was grieving at the death of their beloved disciple? His death by natural causes?) does not mean he is any less a witness to the Risen Christ than Peter, who gave glory to God by martyrdom.

The

End!