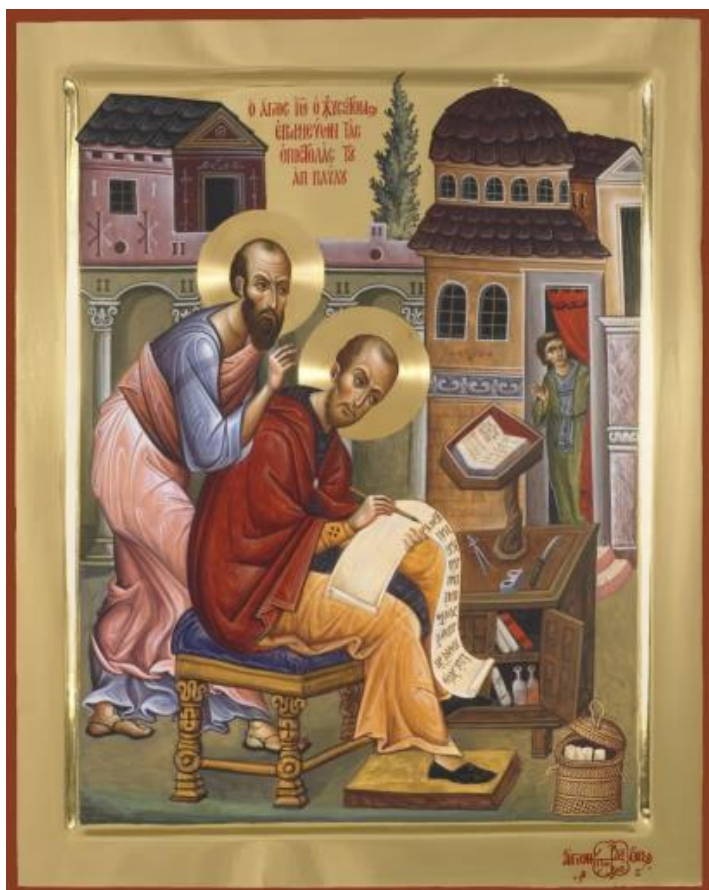


Trinity Book Club
Let's Read a Classic together

Written almost 2000 years ago in Greek
Translated to almost every language in the world
Used by God to change the lives of millions
Is easy to read (even in Greek)
Was made into a movie



Gospel According to John

The Gospel According to St. John

Welcome to the adventure of reading a very special book together. We don't always think of the Gospel According to John as a book because it is often seen as merely one of the 66 books of the Bible. But this book is powerful! And while it is a book of the Bible our groups will focus more on discussion of perceptions and thoughts rather than being part of a "Bible Study."

Why take this approach? There is the danger in a "Bible Study" that the forest is not seen because of all the trees. A pastor once took a group of us through John 20 (Easter). We parsed verbs and considered different viewpoints on how to read words and phrases. The one thing we missed was the joy that Jesus, our Savior, was raised from the dead!

The goal of this study is to allow you, along with those in your group, to explore the one question St. John wants to answer: Who is Jesus? As you read the book, walk in the shoes of the bride's father at the wedding in Cana (chapter 2), one of the 5,000 fed bread and fish (chapter 6), one of those invited to throw the first stone at the sinful woman (chapter 8), Lazarus who had spent three days in his own tomb (chapter 11) or Mary Magdalene who saw Jesus through teary eyes on Easter morning (chapter 20).

And as you see Jesus through their eyes, may you find joy and wonder to see Jesus with your own eyes -- here and now. But be careful that you look deeply to see all of Jesus. Don't settle for a superficial view! Read! Ask questions! Enjoy!

Blessings,
Pastor Heimsoth

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

A Quick Introduction John 1

(This reading is the foundation for Ash Wednesday worship)

Read John chapter one and you are hit like a ton of bricks with some huge statements about Jesus' identity. Like:

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (1:1)
- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (1:14)
- John. . . cried out, "This is the one I spoke about . . . , 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" John 1:15
- John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (1:29)
- Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (1:45)
- Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." (1:49)

Chapter one bombards you with statements of Jesus' identity, but once the introductions are made, John sets out on a meandering course that step-by-step unpeels the layers of who Jesus is and what that means. What John writes for us in chapter 1 is something he would not see himself until he had seen Jesus' whole life (death and resurrection) play out. In fact, what John shares with us in this classic book, would only come many years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

John grew in his understanding of Jesus through many different experiences in his life. May this journey help you grow in your appreciation and knowledge of this man named Jesus.



Week One

The First of Many Signs John 2-4

(Contributors: Emily Adams & Tracey Hackbarth)

Reading Summary:

Chapter Two

Jesus and His disciples attend a wedding. John introduces us to Jesus and His public ministry here. Though Jesus indicates He is not in the wine business (v.4), still he acts. In verses 13-25 we see another side of Jesus — His passion for His Father’s house.

Chapter 3

Here is the famous conversation with Nicodemus. 3:16 is the clear picture of what Jesus came for — to save us. Nicodemus was confused about being “born again.” To this point, what kind of Savior does John reveal to us?

Chapter 4

In this chapter we learn something else about Jesus—we learn how he looks at people. In a culture where men would not speak to women in the streets and Jews would never speak to Samaritans, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman. We can learn a lot here on how Jesus looks at “bad” people.

What do you see in Jesus through these interactions?

Discussion Focus:

John 2:1-25

Turning Water to Wine and Overturning Tables at the Temple

1. John writes of “water to wine” as the first “sign” Jesus gave to show his identity (v.11). Why does he give such importance to this miracle? Does it mean anything that only the servants seem to have been there for the actual miracle?
2. Why was wine at the reception so important that Mary would bring the problem to Jesus? Who would have looked bad if they had run out?

3. Although Jesus tells his mother that wedding wine was neither His problem, nor His purpose, she tells the servant to do what He says. Mary assumes he will help. Why do you think that is?

4. If Jesus is perfect, why does it seem like he is sassing his mother at the wedding? (v.4)

5. Many assume alcohol consumption to be bad. Can we make any assumptions about alcohol consumption from this event?

6. There was always “business” going on at the Temple during Passover.

People needed to exchange currency to buy animals for sacrifices and the Seder meal. What do you think was so wrong with it?

Why do you think Jesus chose this time to “close ‘em down?”

Why do you think John chose to include this at the beginning of his Gospel account (other Gospel writers record it taking place during Holy Week)? What is he saying about Jesus?

7. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (v.19). He was talking about Himself as the “Temple,” not the building. Can you think of other times where people/things/events are lived out in Jesus?

Wrap up Time

8. How did John answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” in the reading this week and what do you like about that answer?
9. Take some time to pray for each other and place in God’s hands the things happening in each other’s lives.

Week Two

I AM the Bread of Life John 5-6

(Contributor: Carolyn Milz)

Reading Summary:

Chapter 5

Jesus heals a man in Jerusalem who had been crippled for 38 years. He did so at one of the public baths with its own history for healing. But, because he did so on the Sabbath, the religious leaders used that to debate Jesus on his identity/authority.

Discussion Focus

John 6:1-71

Feeding the 5,000 -- I AM the Bread of Life

1. Why do they make note of the Passover feast being near? (v.4) That time of year was toward the end of the rainy season and time to harvest their grain crops. Is there a point to connecting these vignettes to specific moments in history?

John gives a short summary of the miracle, then spends a lot of time considering peoples’ reaction to it.

2. Talk about vv.14-15 — what did the people want from Jesus and why did He sneak away.

3. The disciples got in a boat afterward (vv.16-20) and it began to storm. Why do you think they were terrified when they saw Jesus?

4. Instead of being grateful, the people really began to challenge Jesus. Could it be because:
 - Of what He said (vv. 26-29)?
 - Of what He asked them to do (v.29)?
 - They thought He was boasting (vv. 35,41-42)?
 - Or that He refused to feed them again the next day?

Read the passages and discuss your thoughts on why the people struggled to accept Jesus for who He was.

Wrap up Time

5. The people of that time were used to eating very little. We eat too much and have lots of food available. We look at food for enjoyment; they ate for survival. Do we look at Jesus for survival or enjoyment? Discuss.

6. Consider the people in the world who are hungry today. What is our responsibility to them? Consider the people in the world who are spiritually starved because they do not know Jesus. Pray over this matter and how God might use us to feed the world.

Week Three

I AM

John 7-8

(Contributor: Deb Saul)

Reading Summary:

Chapter 7

This chapter is filled with confusion. Jesus does not go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths (vv.3-9), then halfway through the week of celebration He shows up there (v.14). Some think Jesus is possessed (v.20) while others think that since the church leaders had not killed him just maybe the leaders now thought him to be the Messiah (v.26), but then they knew he came from Nazareth and they had been taught one cannot know where the Messiah comes from (v.27). See the confusion?

Amid all the questions, Jesus identifies himself at the end of the festival. The Feast of Booths (tents) took place at the very end of the dry season (tents a reminder of 40 years of wandering in the desert with Moses). On the final day of the feast there would be a prayer for God to restore their water supply. It is here that Jesus stands up and cries out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. . . (vv. 37-38). Wow! What an image He gave!!!

Discussion Focus

John 8:1-59

It seems Jesus has divided the entire nation of Israel, the common people and the religious leaders. They do not know who He is or what to think. Some wonder how a different "Christ" who might come later could possibly do more signs than Jesus has done; how could anyone else surpass Him? Others tell Him, "You are demon-possessed." How would we have reacted to His miracles and revolutionary message?

1. The chapter starts out with a familiar story: In an attempt to trick Jesus into saying something self-incriminating, they bring to him a woman caught in adultery and cite Moses' law calling for her to be stoned. (Read verses 1-11.) "What say you?" they ask Jesus. How did they think Jesus would get in trouble if He agreed with the stoning or if He said she should not be stoned?

2. What was Jesus writing in the dust? No one knows. The Pharisees were experts on Moses, the Psalms and the prophets (their Bible, our Old Testament). Could Jesus have been writing some familiar references? See Exodus 34:5-7 and Psalm 145:8-9.
Do you think He wrote something that condemned the woman or showed grace? (Remember who was reading His scribbles.)

3. Why does St. John bother to tell us the crowd left beginning with the oldest? What meaning do you think there is for this?

4. What lesson do you think the woman learned from this encounter? What can and should we learn from it?
The rest of the chapter seems to be a study in contrasts: Jesus vs. the religious elite. It is a fascinating verbal battle that is seen also in chapters 6 and 7 (and will be seen later as well).

5. Sometimes we wonder why Jesus doesn't just say straight out, "Hey, I'm HIM." Or does He? Read verses 12-59. What are some of the things Jesus says about Himself in these verses? Look particularly at verse 24 and verse 42. Should these have been clear enough for even the Pharisees to understand? Why don't we always see the obvious when God speaks clearly to us?

6. Read verse 43. What might have been blocking the religious leaders and other Jews from really hearing what He was saying? [*Tradition? Fear? Power? Looking for the wrong kind of Messiah?*] Scripture also speaks to us today. What blocks us in 2018 from really hearing – and obeying – what God is saying?

7. This chapter includes a few of Jesus' "greatest hits." See vv. 7, 12, 32, 58. Which resonates the most with you and why?

Wrap up Time

8. Please take a few minutes to comment on the following: Our problem with Jesus is that He forgives others' sins too freely and makes me feel too guilty for mine.
9. Close this session with prayer. Have group members share people they would pray for in their lives to experience God's grace as well as situations group members may be facing.

Week Four

I AM the Good Shepherd John 9-10

(Contributors: Shannon Willey and Jillian Riedel)

Summary:

Chapter 9

This is a fascinating chapter where we see how much the religious elite feel threatened by Jesus in their handling of the "investigation" of Jesus' healing of a man who was blind. They interrogated the man (vv.13-17) and his parents. Knowing their hatred of Jesus, the parents are too frightened to say anything (vv.18-23). The man, now healed, gets sarcastic (v.28) with them as they want to condemn the one who healed him. For all this he is kicked out of the church — but Jesus comes to him (v.38). Read the chapter for all the craziness when people try to discredit God.

Discussion Focus

John 10:1-42

This is known as the Good Shepherd chapter. The major portion of the chapter is Jesus talking, but at the end there is once again this confusing conversation as the Jewish leaders cannot figure out what to do with Him. They were torn (v.24), but in the end chose to oppose Him (v.39).

1. There are many analogies in Jesus' teaching here. What/who is Jesus referring to when he speaks of:
 - Sheep pen (v.1)
 - Thief / robber (vv. 2,10)
 - Sheep
 - Door of the sheep (v.7)
 - Good Shepherd (v.11)
2. How might you try to paint this beautiful and powerful image to a non-believer or new Christian? What makes this image attractive to them?
3. The Jews had seen Jesus perform miracles, but yet didn't believe He is the Son of God. How do you explain their hesitation (and ours)?
4. In v.31, the Jews were ready to stone Jesus again due to His blasphemy. Why does He tolerate them and why does He spare Himself here but not later when He is crucified?
5. In v.24 they said to Jesus, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. His answer is anything but plain. Why does Jesus never give an easy "yes" or "no" answer?

Wrap up Time

6. Discuss why Psalm 23 (another Good Shepherd chapter) is so treasured by Christians.

7. Pray for the lost sheep and the weak sheep. But pray also about how we might be strong sheep to reach out to the lost and the weak.

Week Five

I AM the Resurrection & the Life John 11

(Contributors: Rick Holtzen and Rev. Dennis Mann)

Discussion Focus

John 11:1-57

Jesus' friend, Lazarus was sick. The chapter begins with his sisters, Mary and Martha sending word asking Jesus to come help. They had seen Jesus' healing power. Surely He would use that to help his friend. The chapter gets strange from this point on.

1. Jesus chose not to go to Bethany until after He heard that Lazarus had died. Yet, He said the sickness would not end in death (v.4). What do you think went through the minds of His disciples and Mary and Martha to know He chose not to help Lazarus?
2. When He did choose to leave for Bethany (next door to Jerusalem) His disciples were all confused. They knew it would be dangerous and they wondered if Lazarus was dead or not. Then Thomas throws in the towel and said they should all go with Jesus to die in Jerusalem (v.16)

In the middle of all that Jesus talks about walking in daylight vs. in the dark (vv. 9-10). What do you think that is all about?

3. Discuss the fact that Thomas is the one ready to go and die with Jesus, but is also the one who questioned the resurrection (John 20:24-25).

4. Finally, Jesus showed up — four days after Lazarus had died. One day after he had been officially declared dead (by Jewish law) — the smell would have been a reminder to all that Lazarus was DEAD dead.

When He arrives Martha (who got upset when Mary did not help with dinner, Luke 10:38-42) comes out to meet Him but Mary does not. What do you think about their differing responses to Jesus' late arrival?

5. The day got crazier when Jesus called for them to open up the tomb (stinky!). Lazarus, still wrapped in his linens, was alive! Taking all this in, discuss what it means that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life.” (vv. 25-26)
6. As if this chapter is not confusing enough, what was the reaction of the Jewish leaders to Jesus doing that wonderful thing of raising Lazarus from the dead? (See vv. 45-53.)

Wrap up Time

7. It was great that Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he would die again later. How do you deal with the sadness of someone you love dying and the joy we are to have as they enter the gates of heaven?
8. Identify some people you know who struggle with the death of a loved one (may be a recent death or one from years ago). Pray for them to know God's comfort and peace.

Week Six I AM King John 12-19

(Contributors: Alison Beeker and Molly Gaynier)

Summary

Because it is Holy Week, I challenge you to take time to read all these chapters (It is a little more than one a day). While our discussion will focus on Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Chapters 13-16 are Jesus' final teaching sessions with the disciples. Chapter 17 is called the High Priestly Prayer. Chapter 18 is His arrest and trial. Chapter 19 is the crucifixion. Give yourself time to reflect on your readings. May God speak to your heart.

Discussion Focus

John 12:1-36

1. This chapter begins with Mary, unknowingly setting the stage. In a sense she was anointing Him for His death and burial (v.6). But she only did this wonderful act to show Jesus how much He meant to her. Discuss your thoughts as to why she felt such devotion to Jesus.
2. As the first section displays Mary's act of love, discuss the spin the Gospel puts on Judas (vv. 4-6). Discuss the contrast of Mary and Judas where it concerns pouring such expensive oil on Jesus.
3. Discuss St. John's giving us a glimpse of Judas's preoccupation with money. Does it explain why he sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver or just meant to make us think poorly of Judas?
4. In that culture a war hero would come home riding some big white horse and be welcomed with a parade and the strewing of palm branches. Discuss the tremendous influence Jesus had for the people to welcome Him so. Then discuss what you think they hoped He had come to Jerusalem to do.

5. Are these people who honor Jesus and cry out Hosanna the same people who will degrade Him as He drags his cross through the streets days later? How could they do such a thing?

6. What is the meaning behind Jesus' words in John 12:24? Is this foreshadowing Jesus' crucifixion and the birth of Christianity? Does it have any meaning for us — and our dying to “produce many seeds?” Discuss.

7. In the very last verse of this reading (v.36), Jesus left and hid Himself from the people. I think this shows He was struggling with His upcoming death. This makes me pause every time I read it. I often forget that the all-powerful divine Jesus was also human Jesus — just like you and me. Discuss what it means to know that Jesus struggled with His upcoming crucifixion.

Wrap up Time

8. Jesus was the only one in Jerusalem who knew what He would endure on Friday. There was no one He could share that with. Discuss how hard that must have been and how valuable it is when we have people around us who stand by us in hard times. (Talk also of how powerful it is that Jesus has promised to ALWAYS be there for you.)

9. Pray that people would see and appreciate the wonder of what happened during that first Holy Week. Pray for God to touch hearts this week that they might really celebrate Easter in a new way this year.

Week Seven I AM Your Savior John 20

(Contributor: Mary Holtzen)

Discussion Focus John 20:1-31

By this point in time Jesus is fully defined by John. It took place on the cross. The sign on the cross (INRI) was accurate. This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And in His sacrifice on the cross we see the glory of God, that the God/man Jesus sacrificed everything to save His people. He is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (chapter 1). He is the Good Shepherd and He is the Resurrection and the Life. With His resurrection from the dead comes the realization that He had always spoken the truth.

Thus when Jesus says, “He who lives and believes in me will never die,” (John 11:26) we can know it is true! We have a great KING who has conquered death forever. Enjoy your discussion.

There is always a surprise element to the resurrection of Jesus. It makes no sense—it could not happen! But then Jesus opens our eyes to see. We think that because the resurrection of Jesus has always been part of our lives—Mary and the disciples should have seen it coming. But step into their sandals for a moment.

1. Mary said “They” have taken Jesus away – what was she thinking? Her mind was scrambling for possibilities—and all of them bad. Who would have taken him/ who is “they”? and why? (Jesus alive was not part of her thinking.)
2. Discuss what you think was going on in the minds of Peter and John (vv.1-10) when they arrived at the tomb, having been told the stone had been rolled away. (Remember that John is the author of this book. Does that skew what he says of himself?) What made Peter barrel in (besides just being Peter)?

3. I have always marveled at the fact that Jesus has the head cloth folded up and set aside from the strips – that to me was always proof that He wasn't stolen, etc., but it's just very intriguing to me that He took the time to do it. Picture yourself as John standing at the entrance and seeing these cloths, neatly folded. What goes through your head?

4. This chapter is all about those to whom Jesus reveals Himself alive and how that changes everything.
 - Mary initially only sees open tomb.
 - Peter and John see empty tomb.
 - Mary sees the angels, then a gardener—then Jesus.
 - The disciples in locked room see Jesus.
 - Thomas sees Jesus.

To be more precise, in all these situations, God makes Jesus to be seen by all these people. Is that not how people still come to faith — God's Spirit opens our eyes to see Jesus? Discuss the importance of keeping separate what our minds know about Jesus and what our hearts see.

5. John himself speaks to that in vv. 30-31. I really love these two verses – they say so much about Jesus and who He is, but yet it is also a very personal connection He wants. John wrote all of this inspired by God – that **you** may believe (See also John 21:25.)

Wrap up Time

6. John 19 and 20 have shown us our King, sacrificing His life for us and conquering death. We have seen this Jesus with our own eyes — this one who died for us. Take a moment to reflect back now and marvel that this is the same Jesus who:
 - Turns water into wine to save the reception.
 - Who tells Nicodemus He came to save — not condemn.
 - Gives the woman at the well dignity and value.
 - Heals a man crippled for 38 years.
 - Feeds thousands
 - Thwarts the stoning of a woman others were willing to kill.
 - Raises Lazarus to life

How awesome is it to live knowing this Jesus lives in you?

7. Spend your final time as a class sharing how amazing God is and what he has done for you. If you want to call it prayer — then do so.

Chapter 21 Addendum

I believe that Jesus allows us to enjoy the moment, but is always looking at the “next step.” In John 21 Jesus underscores the reality and wonder of His being alive. It is for the Christian to realize He is always around watching — putting us in a position to be blessed. And as Peter had learned the lesson that the wonder was not in the 153 fish, but it was to see Jesus — Jesus now sends Peter on to be a leader in the church. What does He have planned for you? It is more than you might think.

