



Central Lutheran
MINNEAPOLIS

**The Gospel of John
Bible Study**

Wednesday Nights: 6:00 pm

Winter, 2020

Jesus said: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."*
(John 14:6)

Wednesday Night, January 8

Welcome

The Gospel of John is a beautiful witness to the life, death and new life of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is also deeply evangelical, filled with Jesus' invitation for every follower to pick up the cross and follow in the "way, truth and life." The goal of this Bible study is twofold: to enter the Gospel of John and hear again the good news; and, to hear and explore the invitation to follow in Jesus' way, truth and life.

As always, these Bible studies are more holy conversations. No previous knowledge is expected, in fact it helps to seek to enter the study as if for the first time. Always come to class, no matter if you had a chance to read the suggestions for the week or if the last time you opened the Bible was the previous week.

For this study, you will need your Bible. The weekly suggested readings will help you connect and underline, learn and grow. Bibles will always be available for class, so don't worry if you forget yours at home.

Christ Care Prayers begin each lesson, it is a time when we pray for one another and the needs of the world. If you have a prayer concern that you do not want to share in front of the group, stop and share it before the class begins.

Thank you! Thank you for joining this Bible study, these holy conversations. May you be blessed by the wonder of John's witness to Jesus Christ, by the conversations and by our time together as the body of Christ.

Schedule

Wednesday, January 8: Introduction to the Gospel of John

Wednesday, January 15: Prologue, Prelude and Greater Things: John 1:1 – 5:47

Wednesday, January 22: Conflict and Opposition: John 6:1 – 10: 42

Wednesday, January 29: Prelude (2), Meal and Words of Jesus: John 11:1-17: 26

Wednesday, February 5: The Hour has come: John 18:1 – 19:42

Wednesday, February 12: Resurrection and Appearances: John 20:1 – 21:28

Introduction to the Gospel of John

Christ Care Prayers

Introduction

The opportunity to study John's Gospel is quite amazing. We could spend our time on how the reading of John has continued to grow over time, from one generation to the next, guided by the Holy Spirit. When I was in seminary Father Raymond Brown's study of John (and the emphasis on the signs of Jesus) was such a helpful reading of this Gospel. Martin Luther loved John's Gospel, and from the early Church until today it remains the central Gospel for Good Friday, Easter and Christmas day.

The guides I am using for this study range from class notes from seminary days, to key studies of John by Raymond Brown, Gerald Sloyan and Gail O'Day. Craig Koester, wrote an important article for my own reading of John in *Word and World*, back in 2001. I'm also grateful for an article by Alan Culpepper in *Interpretation*, 1995, that helped me grow into listening for the evangelical call of John, not only to recognize Jesus as the incarnate Word, but also seek to follow Him more and more, each and every day. Recently, Karoline Lewis at Luther Seminary finished her commentary on John, with fresh and insightful readings of these lessons. My prayer is that John's Gospel alone will open your eyes anew to the wonder of the Word made flesh and to Jesus who calls you each day into a deeper relationship with the One who can give you life, truth, grace and love.

John overview

There are many ways to structure our reading and study, Gail O'Day's outline is what we will use to guide our study and conversation. Let's take some time to walk through these sections so you get a working feel for the Gospel, and some key passages to highlight now so that when you arrive at them in the reading they can serve as way posts for you.

Prologue, Prelude and Greater Things: John 1:1 – 5:47

Conflict and Opposition: John 6:1 – 10: 42

Prelude (2) and Jesus' hour: John 11:1 – 12:50

Farewell Meal and Words of Jesus: John 13:1 – 17: 26

The Hour has come: John 18:1 – 19:42

Resurrection and Appearances: John 20:1 – 21:28

Your questions, hopes and expectations

Before we turn to an introduction of the reading for next week, let's pause and check in about your questions, hopes and expectations. Do you have any specific things you want to explore or discuss over the next six weeks?

Reading for Wednesday, January 15: Prologue, Prelude and Greater Things: John 1:1 – 5:47

You can divide the reading over the next seven days, taking a devotional route through the Gospel of John, or you can certainly sit down and read it all in one sitting. I will leave that path up to you, most likely it will be a bit of a hybrid (some weeks more devotional and sometimes in one sitting). With each reading there will be seven questions, one for each day or if you read it in one sitting just pick one or two questions to ponder. The questions will give us a weekly starting point for our holy conversation.

Questions for Wednesday, January 15

1. John 1 is the famous prologue, unique to John's Gospel. What do you hear in these 18 verses that serve as the doorway to the Gospel? How do they echo Genesis 1, and what might that mean?
2. John 1: 19-51 connects us to John the Baptist, and also in the transition from John's followers to Jesus' followers. The first important invitation is offered: "follow me." How do you understand, live and engage in this invitation of Jesus to follow?
3. John 2 is the unique miracle of the water turned to wine. There are many nuances to the story, but what does it mean that a wedding, and the miracle of abundant wine for celebration, is one of the first "signs" that Jesus performs in the Gospel?
4. John 3 leads us to the second most famous passage in scripture (Psalm 23 the most famous). How do you hear the famous John 3:16? As important is John 3:17, for these two verses are connected grammatically by the joiner, indeed. How does John 3:17 illuminate and deepen John 3:16 for you?
5. John 4 takes us out to the margins of society, a place where we will learn and grow often in John's Gospel. What do you recall about Samaritans? As you read chapter 4, take a moment to consider what it means that Jesus is connecting with a Samaritan woman, and one who has divorced often – what boundaries are crossed? Finally, what does it mean that she forgets her water jug to go and tell her community about this Jesus?

6. John 5 takes us to the margins of the law within Jesus community, here he heals on the Sabbath. What does it mean that this sign is performed on the day when the law forbids such an act? What does this tell you about this Jesus who calls you to follow? Will you be welcomed by the One who is always welcoming?
7. These signs have raised serious questions in many communities about this Jesus, the Word of God. As chapter 5 closes, we hear John proclaiming Jesus relationship to God (vs 19-29) and we hear Jesus rebuke, challenge those who refuse his invitation (verses 41-47). How do our images, thoughts or perspectives on God get in the way of the actual presence of Jesus Christ and His call for us to follow? Can we fall into the trap of worshiping our idea of God and miss worshiping the living Jesus who is with us? Examples of how we may hold too tight to images of God and miss the “way, the truth and the life?”

Wednesday night, January 15

Prologue, Prelude and Greater Things: John 1:1 – 5:47

Christ Care Prayers

Introduction

How did the reading go this past week? Remember, if you did not have a chance to read the passages, no worries, we will tend to all of them in class today. We will begin with your questions, what did you hear, what did you learn and how do you hear Jesus' call to follow?

Two passages that some scholars hear as "light motif" or keys to the Gospel of John:

⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."
(John 14:5-6)

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30)

Sign as central word/Word in John's Gospel

The Gospel opens with a series of "signs," a conversation on the meaning/s of the word will be helpful. A symbol (literally same thrown together) is more of a comparison, while a sign signifies or holds something beyond itself. The water turned to wine is not a symbol of God – a sameness – but a sign. The miracle points beyond the miracle to someone greater. Jesus himself is, in many ways, a sign incarnate. Let's pause and reflect on how you hear that, what that means for you and your life of faith.

The reading and last week's questions

Before we move on to look at next week's reading, are there any of the questions you would like to discuss. What did you hear, what was helpful, or what is confusing?

Reading for Wednesday, January 22: Conflict and Opposition: John 6:1 – 10: 42

This week you will hear Jesus proclaim, “I am...” The “I am” statements of Jesus in John’s Gospel are unique. With each proclamation of “I am” the conflict with the Jewish leaders intensifies. As we continue to move deeper into the book of signs, we also now hear a series of the famous “I am” statements of Jesus. Our memories are opened with each as we think back to God’s response to Moses in Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM.”

John’s prologue that connected us to the creating God in Genesis 1, now opens us to the God who delivers in Exodus. How is this Jesus the embodiment of the creative and saving God? How are we called to follow? Within the “I am” saying of Jesus you will find a home and inspiration for a deeper life of faith and service.

Questions for Wednesday, January 22:

1. John 6: 1-35 is the feeding of the 5000, opened with Jesus sharing “I am the bread of life” in verse 35. As you read these verses, what do you hear? How does this sign draw you to Jesus? What does it mean for you that Jesus is the bread of life?
2. John 6: 36-70 is a meditation on Holy Communion. For John, communion is more connected to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 than to the Last Supper. How do you understand this, what does this mean for you? As the chapter closes we hear a refrain that we often use in worship before the reading of the Gospel lesson. How is Word both something we hear and something we taste?
3. John 7: 1-52 is a chapter with the undercurrent of “water.” Water was a crucial need in the wilderness, and the festival of booths that Jesus attends as the chapter opens is a fall celebration for the Jews that commemorates the wilderness wandering. We cannot help but read this with baptismal images, as well. What does it mean to be thirsty, spiritually thirsty? How are we “parched” as a culture today, and how does our thirst cause division and conflict? What is Jesus’ invitation?
4. John 7:53 - 8:11 is one of John’s most famous lessons. It is filled with wisdom, love and compassion. What do you hear in the lesson that inspires you? What did you read that you did not notice before? If this is your first time reading this lesson, what is surprising and what is comforting?

5. John 8:12 – 59 begins the meditation on Jesus as the light of the world. It is the prologue to chapter 9. By verse 31 we begin to have the tension between faith and disbelief, between seeing and not seeing. As we discussed a few weeks ago, how do we confuse what we think about God and the actual relationship with Jesus? How do we also fall into the trap of worshiping our own images of God, while we fail to see the One Jesus who continually calls us to renewal, growth and new beginnings?
6. John 9: 1-41 is a sign of God's healing that leads to both physical and spiritual sight. As you enjoy this amazing miracle, watch how physical sight leads to spiritual sight for one man while the healing leads to darkened physical as well as spiritual sight for others. How is spiritual sight connected to our physical sight; and how is the opposite true, as well? Can you think of examples of how what we look for opens us to God, and how God opens our eyes to one another?
7. John 10: 1-41 is the beautiful chapter where Jesus proclaims that he is the good shepherd, he is the gate to the safety of God's love. How is this chapter deeply connected to Psalm 23? What does it mean for you that Jesus is your good shepherd? As we move father from the farm culture, what other images or "I am" sayings might be helpful to communicate this love and care of Jesus Christ for you and me?

Wednesday Night, January 22

Conflict and Opposition: John 6:1 – 10: 42

Christ Care Prayers

Introduction

There are deep themes at work in the readings for this week. Jesus Christ has come into the world and into your life to bring meaning, hope and love. Jesus proclaims that all are welcome, all are fed at God's table, and there is water to sustain us, sight given and a Good Shepherd to gather us together. It is all about Jesus Christ who has come so there will be one flock and one shepherd.

We will begin with your questions, what did you hear, what did you learn? Have there been moments when you not only read with your head, but heard the words with your heart and soul?

I am...

Let's pause for a moment and consider the "I am" sayings of Jesus. Do you have one that really connects the pieces for you right now in life? Why, what do you hear in that moment? How does that image of Jesus open your faith and how does it invite you to deeper growth in Him?

The reading and last week's questions

Before we move on to look at next week's reading, are there any of the questions you would like to discuss. What did you hear, what was helpful, or what is confusing?

Reading for Wednesday, January 29: Prelude (2) Meal and Words of Jesus: John 11:1 – 17:50

If John 1 is both prologue and prelude to the book of signs, then John 11 is a second prelude or introduction to what is to come in the Gospel. John 11 is the story of Lazarus. It is the most dramatic and emotional thus far. Jesus' friend

dies, Lazarus' sisters are angry, Jesus weeps and the power of God is on display in the sign of Lazarus' new life. It opens us to what is to come.

The preparations begin for Jesus' death and new life. John knows we know this, remember he and his community put these words down sometime after 100 AD. By then, most would have known of Matthew, Mark or Luke's Gospels. Since we know the movement of Holy Week so well, John takes us to a deeper place with each day. Last Suppers become moments for serving, gatherings of the faithful moments for encouragement, invitations to love abound and life in the world is filled with hope as it is grounded in prayer.

Questions for Wednesday, January 29:

1. John 11: 1-57 is the whole story of the raising of Lazarus. You have the option of reading it all the way through in one sitting and reflecting on these questions or dividing it as you see fit as you read, pausing at the natural breaks in the story.
 - a. We hear that Lazarus is ill, but Jesus delays. This has always thrown scholars, why? The response to this question will depend on how you understand Jesus (as One who knows all and is not worried, as one in the midst of busy ministry, as one who knows of God's power to heal....)
 - b. As they go, there is a sense of conflict that Thomas alludes to, it also sets the timeline that Lazarus was dead. What do you hear in these transitional verses?
 - c. Verses 17-27 get to the heart of grief and anger. How are they related? How do we see them in Mary and Martha?
 - d. Verses 28-44 are the center of this lesson. What do you hear? What moves you?
 - e. Verses 45-57 reveal that this sign, the raising of Lazarus, is the final straw for the religious leaders, we can sense the turn. How do you hear the tension in the text?
2. John 12: 1-50 moves us along with the anointing in Bethany, Palm Sunday and the conclusion of Jesus public ministry.
 - a. As chapter 12 opens, Jesus is with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Mary anoints Jesus, which sets in motion the events that led to his death. We also hear that Lazarus has become a living "sign" of Jesus Christ.
 - b. What does it mean that all who have died and are raised are living "signs" of God's love? Do you hear baptismal images in this? What does this mean for your life?
 - c. Do you hear God's invitation as this chapter comes to a conclusion?

3. John 13: 1-38 is the Last Supper, but it is the foot washing that is central. Rather than Jesus at a table, he is on his hands and knees washing the feet of his followers. Even washed by Jesus, Peter will still deny him. What might it mean for you that in death, your first experience of new life will be Jesus washing your feet? How does this inspire your daily life of faith right now?
4. John 14: 1-31 is a tender chapter for us as the readers of this Gospel. The vision of Jesus as the “I am,” returns with verse 6: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” What might it mean that these words, at this point in the Gospel, are the central meaning of who Jesus is and what it means for us as his followers?
5. John 15: 1-27 is a meditation on life together. We are connected by this Jesus Christ who proclaims “I am the vine.” Literally, he is the root and trunk and we are the branches. Connected, Jesus invites us to live in love. Love is what holds all together, God’s love in Jesus Christ. How is this the guiding ethic and vision for all faith communities and the Church together, for you?
6. John 16: 1-33 is a vision of our live in the world. We often hear that the Christian faith and the world are in conflict, but from John 3:16 we know that God’s love is for all – and God does not separate faith/world; belief/life; sacred/secular. God is at work in all. What does it mean for you that Jesus calls us to courage as the chapter concludes?
7. John 17: 1-26 is Jesus high priestly prayer. It is a complex prayer. Perhaps meditate on this in three parts:
 - a. John 17: 1-5 is Jesus prayer for himself
 - i. What does he pray for?
 - b. John 17: 6-19 is Jesus prayer for the disciples
 - i. What does he pray for?
 - c. John 17: 20-26 is Jesus prayer for the Church universal
 - i. What does he pray for?

Wednesday Night, January 29

January 29: Prelude (2) Meal and Words of Jesus: John 11:1 – 17:50

Christ Care Prayers

Introduction

We cannot underestimate the power of the Lazarus chapter for our personal faith and for our shared faith as the body of Christ. Death and new life are the primary ways we talk about faith in Jesus Christ. It is helpful to pause and think about all the ways that death holds us and how God in Jesus Christ sets us free and restores us to new life.

What are the images of death that you think about, from sin and hopelessness to selfishness and anger, what images come to mind? How does God set you free? How does God set us free for new life? What are the images of resurrection, from forgiveness to healing and from reconciliation to growth, how do you talk of resurrection?

Lazarus

So, Lazarus, now that you have been raised from the dead again this very day, how are you going to live your life? How do we hold a sense of Lazarus about us always? What might that open in our daily lives? How would that empower us to let go, live with a sense of grace and humility? How might that give us permission to let go of control, to let go of the need for things to turn out a certain way or for people to respond as we want them to respond? It is not a way of “who cares,” but rather of a deeper caring that knows that in Jesus we can give ourselves away to God and to one another. What freedom does this give to you?

John 12-14

As John continues after the raising of Lazarus, he now invites us into the very heart of Jesus. He proclaims a Jesus who serves, gives life, shares love, and prays. This is the very pattern for our daily life of faith: to serve, give life, share

love and pray. All of this now moves us to the event that makes it all possible: Jesus death and resurrection.

What was surprising for you? What was comforting? How were you challenged? How did you hear God's call for you?

What does it mean for you that Jesus is the way, truth and the life (John 14:6)?

A life of faith within a local faith community: John 15-17

These chapters are essential for our personal life in Jesus Christ, and for our shared life in Jesus Christ. They are about serving all, humility, surrender, love and daily prayer for unity. One simply cannot read these chapters that lead us to the death of Jesus Christ and seek division. We cannot insist on one's own way when we are invited to live a life grounded in the love proclaimed in John 3:16 and illuminated in John 15-17.

How do we miss this call? How does our own worship of what we think Church or faith, or life should be get in the way of worshiping the One, Jesus Christ?

The reading and last week's questions

Before we move on to look at next week's reading, are there any of the questions you would like to discuss. What did you hear, what was helpful, or what is confusing?

Reading for Wednesday, February 5: The Hour has come: John 18:1 – 19:42

The One who has come to give us life and truth, to be our way, now proclaims: 'It is finished.' We read to this one moment, and there pause in faith and humility.

It is hard to capture the importance for our shared life of faith as expressed in these two chapters of John. It is perfect for a devotional reading each day. It is also the perfect section of John's Gospel to read in one sitting.

Here we witness the death of Jesus Christ for you and me, and then wait with expectation for Easter Sunday.

Questions for Wednesday, February 5

1. John 18: 1-18 is the betrayal, and within a story of rage and peace. It is also a story of denial. How are we tempted to betray? How are we tempted to misdirected rage? How do we fall to the temptation to deny? In these honest confessions is both a moment of humility, and the beginning of faith – how is that possible?
2. John 18: 19-40 is a series of trials (the high priest, Simon Peter, Caiaphas and then Pilate), what is happening, as you hear it, in the movement from one place of power to another?
3. John 19: 1-16 is the detailed account of Jesus and Pilate, as you read this section, there are specific questions to consider:
 - a. What is at stake for Jesus' innocence for Pilate?
 - b. Why do the Jews need Pilate to crucify Jesus?
 - c. At verse 8, Pilate is afraid, why?
 - d. Verse 11 is connected to Chapter 18: 36-38 and the reality of truth. What is, or better yet, who is the truth?
 - e. Pilate gives the orders, and the deepest of idols is set in motion in verse 15.
4. John 19: 17-25 is the crucifixion, Jesus nailed to the cross. The cross was a common form of capital punishment, and a source of power for the Roman Empire. At verse 21-22, do we hear Pilate's confession? Rare, in many ways for John, is verse 24 and the fulfillment of Psalm 22.
5. John 19: 25b – 27 is the unique story of John taking over the care of Mary.
6. John 19: 28-30 is the death of Jesus. The seven last words you may remember as the basis for Good Friday services are actually from all four of the Gospels. Here we have two of the seven that are usually noted: "I thirst," and "It is finished." There is a sense in the bowing of the head that is it a voluntary act, and also of a completeness, rather than an end in the "it is finished." What does it mean, for you, that Jesus is willing to die? What does it mean that the cross is about completeness, rather than a finishing?
7. John 19: 31-42 is the accounting of the events that follow, tied to the Passover and also with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. What do you think it means that Nicodemus is a crucial part of this moment in the Gospel? How has this one moved from coming to Jesus at night to serving at such a crucial moment in the Gospel?

Wednesday Night, February 5

The Hour has come: John 18:1 – 19:42

Christ Care Prayers

Meet at the foot of the cross

We arrive at the heart of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ – part one. Here Jesus dies for you and me. Without the cross and Jesus' free gift of love, the world (cosmos) would have been lost. Permanent night would have fallen over the beauty of God's creation. Because of Jesus death and resurrection light shines and the night/darkness cannot overcome it.

This is true in your life at the most personal level, it is true for our families and for all people. Jesus prayer is answered and lifted up on the cross all people are gathered together (John 3 and John 17).

In the complexity of faith, how have we as the followers of Jesus missed the unity we have in Jesus Christ? Why have matters of interpretation divided us, we who agree on the necessity of Jesus' life-giving death and resurrection? Why can we not meet at the foot of the cross? What invitation to grace awaits us each day?

The reading and last week's questions

Before we move on to look at next week's reading, are there any of the questions you would like to discuss. What did you hear, what was helpful, or what is confusing?

Reading for Wednesday, February 12: Resurrection and Appearances: John 20:1 – 21:28

We do not remain at the foot of the cross, for the cross is empty by the end of the day on Good Friday. So too the tomb is empty as daylight dawns on Easter Sunday. Now we turn to the wonder of Easter Sunday and Jesus' appearances to his followers.

How do you hear yourself in these accounts? How has this journey and holy conversation renewed your faith so that you too "may come to believe that Jesus

is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name?"

Here we witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ for you and me.

Questions for Wednesday, February 12

1. John 20: 1-10 is when the word arrives from Mary, who thinks the body has been taken. There is tension here between her witness and the disciple's faith. Still, she is the first witness to the resurrection. What does it mean that a woman is the first to tell the Good News?
2. John 20: 11 -18 is the account of Jesus and Mary. She encounters the angels, and still in grief cannot take it all in. It is not until Jesus speaks her name in verse 16 that her eyes are opened. Then she sees and believes – that familiar theme of physical sight and spiritual sight returns. When did Jesus speak your name? When has he spoken it in your life, in moments that have brought you physical and even spiritual sight?
3. John 20: 19-29 opens the doors of faith for the disciples locked in fear and doubt. Can you relate to the disciples fear? When has God brought you peace that has opened life for you? When have you been in doubt and had faith renewed? What might it mean that doubt is not the opposite of faith, but an important compliment? For John, fear is much more the challenge to faith, the emotion/experience/reality that blocks or hinders faith and trust. Does that make sense to you?
4. John 20: 30-31 is the key "signature" of John, his invitation for faith in Jesus as witnessed in this Gospel. How do I know God loves me? How do I know Jesus forgives me? How do I know that God's light will illuminate the darkness? We ask these questions. John answers, I tell you in this Gospel, and the Good News of John 3:16 that we see in these final chapters is yours.
5. John 21:1-14 is an echo of the call of the disciples. They are called again, by one last miracle and by the physical Jesus there on the shore to eat, laugh and be with them. It is an experience that each disciple must have held close, and must have sustained their faith, even to the ends of the earth. What parts of this lesson catch your imagination?
6. John 21: 15-19 is just for Peter. His three denials are overturned. Jesus intentionally opens his life through forgiveness and expressions of love. It is quite an amazing moment. When have you been forgiven, how has this opened your life again? How did the moment of forgiveness and love lead you to renewed action?
7. John 21: 20-24 is a bit of housekeeping. John is lifted up as the beloved, and the power of the Gospel is shared. It has always been a question in

each generation, when will the end come? Without a certainty about the end, we are invited to live by grace and love. How will the Church share this witness when the first eye-witnesses die? That is a question for the letters of John, and how each faith community shares in wisdom and holy conversation.

Wednesday Night, February 12

Resurrection and Appearances: John 20:1 – 21:28

Christ Care Prayers

Jesus returns, again and again

John's Gospel is unique in how many times Jesus returns. He is raised on Easter Sunday, returns Easter Sunday evening, the following week and then by the sea. He returns to share a word of peace, comfort and grace.

Which of the moments in these final chapters is captivating for you? Why, what does it open in you?

The reading and last week's questions

Before finish today, we can look at last week's reading, are there any of the questions you would like to discuss. What did you hear, what was helpful, or what is confusing?

Are there any questions you would like to return to from any of our conversations over the past weeks?

Thank you

Finally, thank you. It has been a pleasure to journey with you in faith and love. These holy conversations are the renewal of faith for me. Hearing the witness to faith in Jesus Christ is the place of hope, the light in the darkness.