

John the Baptist refers twice to Jesus as the “Lamb of God” in the first chapter

In addition to replacing Jewish feasts, John’s Gospel has Jesus replacing Jewish **Prophets** associated with these feasts. Jesus replaces Abraham (8:58), Jacob (4:12, the Good Shepherd David (8:42) as well as Moses (5:46). **Jesus is what all these people point toward.** In the case of the prophet Moses, Jesus replaces Moses’ Paschal lamb and he replaces other Exodus gifts from God such as bread (Manna), water, and wine with the spiritual nourishment of his own flesh and blood (Chapter 6).

So for John, **Jesus** is the new liturgy! Jesus overrides all that gone before; in him everything is to be reinterpreted, and renewed. This is often noted by the author. Saint Paul would say it like this - *for those who are in Christ there is a new creation.*

Misunderstanding

In the story of Nicodemus, how Jesus often speaks on a *heavenly* level while the hearer converses with him on an *earthly* level. The misunderstanding which ensues then gives Jesus the chance to teach and explain more deeply. In Nicodemus in Chapter 3 we now have the first attempt to really *understand* Jesus. In the cleansing of the temple they are those who reject him altogether, those who do believe and at the end of chapter two/beginning of three there is a man who is inclined to believe in Jesus, he comes to him at night and he hails him as a Rabbi, a teacher who comes from God. Nicodemus means “raised up by God” and John indicates that this is not an adequate faith.

Nicodemus in this story is a kind of crypto Christian; John mentions several times in the gospel people who are in the synagoga who believe in Jesus but don’t want it to be known publically, the fact that Nicodemus comes at night that later on when he speak on Jesus’ behalf he doesn’t indicate his faith, suggests that he is one of these crypto Christians, At the end of the gospel Nicodemus will emerge more clearly ; he will come and take part in Jesus’ burial.

Nicodemus will think of *life* as he knows it and *birth* as he knows it and so will be utterly confused when Jesus speak about *unless you are born again*-the conversation is at cross purposes and this forces Jesus to explain more clearly. **Misunderstanding leads to deeper explanation.** This is the whole point! To us, the partner in the conversation may seem somewhat dim! The reader can rejoice because they (we) are not as dim, we are brighter than the other party! Now, it is not simply a dialogue but a three-way scenario. The challenge is to the **reader** (i.e. us) to understand. John would say to us “You don’t understand either, and the Jesus who is seemingly speaking to Nicodemus or to the woman or the crowd is actually drawing **you** in and asking, “Do **you** really understand these things?” This is the a feature of his gospel. It is a drama which draws the audience in. Encounter.

It is the same in story of the Samaritan woman at well. He will use the language of water to symbolise what he has comes to give. We need water to survive – i.e. the water in the bucket - but **he** brings water to well up to eternal life. The same with the “bread” at the multiplication of loaves. The word “true” or “real” is used to refer to the reality from above. So even though the language is taken from ordinary experience, the realities are divine, not earthly. The true food, water, life, these are the heavenly realities. The heavenly realities are life! He gives life because he is God’s Son. *I am* replaces the notion of the *Kingdom of God*.

A helpful way to approach John is to divide the gospel into two:

"The Book of Signs": 1:19—12:50 - where Jesus **gives signs** of his identity *and*
"The Book of Glory": 13:1—20:31 where he becomes **The Sign** of redemption.

At the very centre, Chapter 10, verse 10, John gives his focus statement:

I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance.

Important: John’s is a *Christology from above*.



In this **Book of Signs** we find seven separate events in which the author explores the relationship between faith and the miraculous deeds of Jesus - but that word *miracle* is not used - we find instead.... "This was the first of the *signs* given by Jesus”.

John uses what scholars call a *circular logic*: faith needs a sign, it needs something concrete, and yet faith is required in order to make sense of the sign, and to enter into the mystery more deeply. On the one hand, human people cannot just believe in abstractions, they need sensual contact with the object of belief. In that sense, the miraculous actions of Jesus are signs, wonderful works of God which facilitate our faith; however on the other hand, if you don’t have faith, you may misunderstand the signs, interpreting them only in a surface way, like the people who wanted Jesus to perform the miracle of the loaves again and again, because it was easy bread, rather than concentrate on the meaning behind the sign.

So: in the Book of Signs we have 7 separate incidents -

- ◆ **Cana**
- ◆ **the cure of the royal official's son**
- ◆ **the cure of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda**
- ◆ **miracle of the loaves**
- ◆ **walking on the water**
- ◆ **the cure of the man born blind**
- ◆ **the raising of Lazarus.**

The stories of the signs are structured by the evangelist in such a way that they invite you to a deeper faith, or from *no faith* into an experience of God's gracious presence: they often have four aspects to them:

1. A request: a question to Jesus, usually tied to some problem: - *they have no wine, he's been blind from birth, the one you love is dead, what can you do?*
2. Jesus responds then with a **sign** - *plenty wine, feeding of a multitude, raising of Lazarus.*
3. Then there is misunderstanding of the sign - *he can cure a blind man but doesn't keep the Sabbath,*
4. Jesus’ clarification of these signs, which he often does through what we can call "I am" sayings. The fourth Gospel shows us constant attempts to identify Jesus - by *outsiders*, by believers, and by Jesus himself - **outsiders** call him *priest, prophet* , **believers** call him *messiah*, **Nathaniel** calls him *king of Israel*, the **Samaritans** call him *Saviour of the world*, **Peter** calls him *Holy one of God*, **Thomas** calls him *My Lord and my God*.

The **Book of Signs** invites the reader into faith, but in another sense the whole gospel is about the **Great Sign** of Jesus' death and resurrection; the earlier signs in the Book of Signs prepare the reader for the **Great Sign** which can only be grasped by those who already have faith. The story of Thomas is a story of lack of faith changed to belief by encounter. The evangelist constantly is inviting the reader to encounter Christ, not just to learn the incident or to list the signs: each incident in the Book of Signs is an invitation into a world of faith—an

invitation to ask the question, receive the response, even to misunderstand the sign, but then have it clarified by the "I am" statement of Jesus.

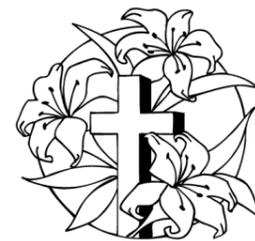
These "I am" statements are distinctive to the fourth gospel - there are seven of them, corresponding to the seven signs and days of the new creation. In all of them, there is, beneath the metaphor that Jesus uses, a **claim to be the source of the life that comes from God.**

For example, **after multiplying the loaves he declares** - (6:35) *I am the bread of life*; this is not the bread given by Moses in the desert - only Jesus is the genuine bread, the stuff of life because he comes down from God and offers the life that comes from God.

GO AND WASH



IN THE POOL OF SILOAM

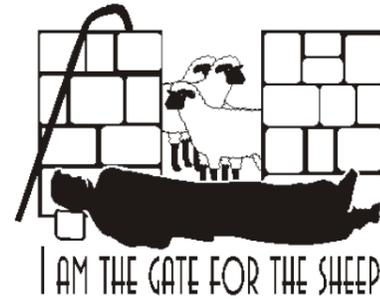


For God so loved
the world that he gave
his one and only Son.

John 3:16

At the feast of Booths, the harvest festival (7:2) - he says **I am the light of the world** - before his coming, people were in darkness,

Three of the **I am** statements emphasise the relationship between Jesus and his followers. In contrast to *thieves and robbers* who destroy the sheep Jesus declares, *I am the gate of the sheepfold*; (10:7) those who enter by him will be saved and be given life. *I am the Good Shepherd* (10:14); The thief comes to kill and destroy: he has come that they might have *life in abundance*. The third of these statements particularly stresses Jesus as the source of life for his followers: *I am the vine*; those who are cut off from him wither and die but those who stay joined to him flourish and bear fruit.



Two **I am** statements are different because they are not so metaphorical as the previous ones, they are more straightforward claims of identity. In response to the crisis of the death of Lazarus, and to Martha's belief in a future resurrection he says - *I am the resurrection and the life* 11.25. Those who believe in him will never die completely, but will live God's life.

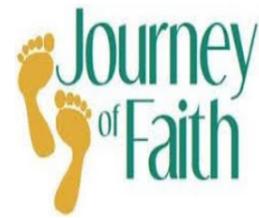
Finally Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper - *I am the way, the truth and the life*. This last **I am** statement makes clear what all the others have suggested - that in contrast to every form of human striving, Jesus brings the genuine life that can only come from God; He is revealer and life-giver.

I AM HE

Closing Prayer: The Word of God is Bread for me,
His Life the Light by which I see,
The Door through which I enter in,
To join the sheep inside the pen.
The Shepherd gave His life for me,
That I might resurrected be.
The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Vine,
Now I am his, and He is mine.

THE LEFTOVERS BY JESSICA POWERS

With twenty loaves of bread, Elisha fed
The one hundred till they were satisfied,
And scripture tells us there was bread left over.
Jesus did more: with five small barley loaves,
And two dried fish he fed five thousand men
Together with their wives and children, all
Neatly arranged upon the cushioned grass,
The awed disciples, when the crowd had eaten,
Gathered up what was left : twelve baskets full.
Who then received these fragments? Hopefully,
the least (though not less favoured) and the poor.
I think of those who always seem to get
the leavings from the banqueting of others,
the scraps of bread, of life, that goodness saves.
I pray that they come proudly when invited,
make merry at their meal and have their fill,
and rise up thankfully, remembering
the fragments, too, were miracles of love.



The Gospel of John

"Come and See" - a Book of signs

Session 10—2016-2017

Con-necting to the previous sessions:

How have we been helped thus far to become a more biblical and liturgical people?

Biblically, I think we have learned (at least) four things to help us in this regard:

- ♦ how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament *Law and Prophets* with the inauguration of the *kingdom* or *reign* of God;
- ♦ that this reign of God is essentially an **event**, not a new instruction; "you live in it" through teachings and healings. Jesus is a master teacher ("with authority, unlike their scribes?!") and a great storyteller;
- ♦ that it is universally acknowledged that John the Baptist has a role of singular significance in the unfolding of salvation history;
- ♦ that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of everything in salvation history.

Liturgically, we have learned that the home of the scripture is the liturgical event, the living expression of the work of God; the mystery of Jesus and salvation unfolding in the course of the liturgical year.

So we can say all these things confidently to anyone who asks!

If we have learned all this, what can John's Gospel and John's Jesus add?

Short answer: If the synoptics paint a vivid word picture of the Jesus **event**, John reveals the intimacy of the Jesus **encounter**. In Luke and Matthew the preaching of Jesus centres on the *Kingdom*: in John it centres on the truth that everything he says and does flows from his relationship with *the Father*. *I am...* The **signs** which Jesus gives affords him the opportunity to teach and witness to the Father—as he does so he forms his disciples in Truth. **The fourth Gospel is a chronical of divine revelation in intimacy.**

NB: Our pursuit in this gospel adventure is not a critical analysis but a desire for ongoing conversion/encounter. This evangelist is one who "reclines with his head on the breast of Jesus at the supper, and in so doing hears the divine heartbeat."

Start at the beginning!

From John's Prologue -which is the kernel of the gospel, *the message in miniature* as it were, we see that Jesus is the Word of God, expressed in a body, in a human life. In and through this Word, grace and truth have come into the world - from the beginning. But we were blind and lived in the dark, unaware that God's feeling towards us, his relationship within us, was one of love. Jesus came to enlighten us, to make us conscious of what had been there from the beginning. Jesus is God's Word to us (he is a Revealer) and he the one who makes us aware of what was there from the beginning (so he is a Restorer).

How does John develop the notion of "fulfilment"

The actions of Jesus, from chapter two onwards, have an important role to set a tone of *replacement* in the gospel; this Jesus is the inaugurating *the new creation*. John's very first words echo the old beginning in Genesis:

In the beginning...

From then until the Wedding feast at Cana there is the schema of a week, the week of the new creation:

Day One: (1:19): Levites come to John the Baptist and ask "Who are you?" - "Not the Christ", he says.

Day Two (1:29): "The next day" John announces *Ecce Agnus Dei*, "Behold the Lamb of God".

Day Three: (1:35): "The next day"the encounter of Andrew and the others.

Day Four: (1:43): "The next day.....leaving for Galilee and the call of Philip and Nathaniel.

Days Five and Six: a three day journey, about forty miles.

Day Seven: (2:1) "Three days later" or "On the third day" - Cana: the wedding feast, the new wine, the "first sign".

So, "replacement" is an important literary motif for John

Jesus "replaces" the Jewish temple, it feasts, and its cultic symbols. For example, John replaces the water (rain) of Tabernacles with Jesus as the water of eternal life (4:14, 7:38) and the sunlight of Tabernacles with Jesus as the light of the world (8:12). Especially, Jesus replaces the Passover.