allow us to accept praise without losing our heads.

And may we help others see how we see your love shining through their lives. Amen.

Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church



Photo Credit Brett Jordan/unsplash.com

St John 6

Sunday 17th July – Saturday 23rd July 2022

Introduction

Scholars think that the work we know as St John's Gospel has its origins in the 70s AD but reached its final form at some point between the years 90 and 110. It differs from the other Gospel in the way it presents Jesus - through a series of seven "signs" starting with the Wedding at Cana and ending with the raising of Lazarus and a series of seven "I Am" speeches which reflect growing tension between the embryonic Church and the Synagogue. Christianity soon separated itself from Judaism and St John is a record of the start of this separation. Tragically, the way the writer portrays Jewish people were used by later commentators to justify murderous anti-semitism and it is hard to hear phrases like "the Jews" in this Gospel without a shudder.

Like the other Gospels it is anonymous but it does identify "the disciple whom Jesus loved" as a source. Its similarities in style with the three Johannine Epistles lead modern scholars to treat them as coming, if not from the same author, but from a community of authors. Of course, like many debates on Biblical authorship all this is speculation.

We're not as familiar with St John as it is not read through the year like the other Gospels are. Instead, large chunks are inserted into the Church year so we know some passages very well indeed and others not at all well. Over the next few months we will read our way through this Gospel allowing ourselves to read the entire book not just selected passages chosen by the Church for Sunday after Sunday.

which is why the bully has never met them. Why exaggerate?

But what if we start thinking of all the things done in Jesus' name since his ministry? Jesus has motivated great acts of compassion and self-sacrifice, and amazing works of art - and great evils have been done in his name including sectarian violence, colonial repression, and, to take a modern example, conversion therapy of LGBT people. So you might find books in all sorts of sections of the library - art, science, true crime - that recount the acts inspired by, or attributed to, service to Jesus.

Where would the book of your deeds best fit in the library? Would it be a family saga, telling of the way you loved those around you? Would it be a grand adventure? Would it be in the politics section, describing how you rebalanced the scales towards the poor and vulnerable?

I would be quite pleased if the book of my life ended up in the humour section - I've always felt life is too important not to laugh at, and humour can be a great way to make a point memorably, or defuse a tense situation.

But whether we would contribute a slim volume or a massive blockbuster to such a library, I pray that we may all know that our lives are known to God, and be able to make God known through them.

Prayer

God, who knows our inmost thoughts, and our most minor actions,
we pray that our lives may reflect your love.

When we feel ashamed about something we have done,
help us to understand how to make things better.

When we are hopeless, and don't know where to turn,
show us the way.

When we have done something good,

remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!'

This seems to imply that we should not worry about what our own and each other's ultimate end will be. The important thing is what we do between now and then. Whether our response to Jesus is the strong emotion of friendship, or a considered decision of esteem and duty, or accepting his unexpected call to a job, what matters is to follow Jesus, and leave the ends of our lives in his hands.

Prayer

Day by day, dear Lord,
of thee three things I pray:
to see thee more clearly,
to love thee more dearly,
to follow thee more nearly,
day by day.

(attributed to Richard of Chichester, 1197-1253)

Saturday 23 July 2022 St John 24 - 25

Gordon Woods, Elder, St. Columba's URC, Oxford

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Reflection

These verses always seem a bit much for me - there are clearly a finite number of things Jesus could have done during his life on earth, and even in John's time I suspect there would have been enough books to contain all the details! It reminds me a bit of the bullied teenager claiming that of course they have a girlfriend/boyfriend, they just go to another school

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION....2

SUNDAY 17 JULY 2022 PSALM 100....3

MONDAY 18 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 20: 19-23 5

TUESDAY 19 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 20: 24 - 29....6

WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 20: 30 - 21: 14 8

THURSDAY 21 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 21: 15 - 19 11

FRIDAY 22 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 21: 20 - 23 13

SATURDAY 23 JULY 2022 ST JOHN 24 - 25 14

Sunday 17 July 2022 Psalm 100

The Rev'd Dr Michael Hopkins, Minister of a group of Methodist and United Reformed Churches based around Farnham, Surrey, and Clerk of the General Assembly.

Let every voice on earth resound,
and joyful hearts hold God adored;
in gladness
may God's courts abound
with songs of praise unto the Lord.

2: You are the Lord; by whose design
all we in nature claim our place;
your flock, we bind our lives to you,
and rest secure beneath your grace.

3: Before the Lord bring thanks and praise,
unfathomed mercies wait in store;
God's goodness blesses all our days,
God's truth endures forever more!

Michael Morgan © 2011 Faith Alive Christians Resources
This is set to Old One Hundredth "All People That On Earth Do Dwell"

Reflection

As a young child, I often accompanied my father on his preaching engagements. One chapel, we visited regularly, had a banner painted across the front of the chapel, high on the wall above the pulpit, so it could always be seen, with the words "enter into his courts with praise". I didn't then know that the words were from Psalm 100.

If we take this Psalm seriously, we are reminded that the worship and praise of God is why we are here, and what God has gathered God's people into a community, which we call the Church, in order to offer God our thanks and praise.

In a time when faith is challenged, and the organisation of the community, the Church, is beset by many storms around us, it is perhaps difficult to imagine crowds of faithful witnesses moving together as one in praise to God, yet it is precisely at such times when words such as these should come to our lips. Questions such as why are we here, and what is the Church for, often seem to be asked, and this Psalm tells us that the answer is the worship and praise of God. Many things will flow from that as responses to our worship and your call to use to act and work with you in the world, but this Psalm reminds us that the reason you called us into your Church to offer worship and praise.

Whenever we sing this Psalm we join a vast community of praise throughout the course of history. We celebrate God's enduring commitment to the redemption of the world, and we reaffirm our common identity as God's people, united in wonder, love, and praise.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, who showed us our place in your heavenly Father's love,

Friday 22 July 2022 St John 21: 20 - 23

The Rev'd Bernie Collins, retired minister, member of Avenue St. Andrew's URC, Southampton

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'

Reflection

What do these last words between Jesus and Peter, as recorded in John's Gospel, convey to us about where our committed following of Jesus may lead us?

After being fed by Jesus, when Peter had been trying to gather food with some of the disciples, Jesus had probed Peter's conscious devotion to him as well as his spontaneous affection (using two different words for love). And as the conversation progressed Jesus had charged him with responsibilities to feed the little ones and govern the older ones who would need the shepherd's care (again using two different words for the members of his flock, and two different words for how to look after them). Then Jesus had made clear that Peter would eventually be bound and led away to a death which would nevertheless glorify God, if he followed him in this way.

So, in today's reading, Peter looked round at the other followers that he should be concerned for, and saw one that he knew Jesus particularly loved and had been able to share the distress of impending betrayal with, and had given a special responsibility: to look after his mother, Mary. Peter asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus replied, 'If it is my will that he

Peter's act of 'going fishing', this was not only a call to provide spiritual feeding, but it was also a call to physically feed the people. Peter was to ensure those who would follow Jesus were nourished body, mind and soul. In Bromley United Reformed Church, since 2006, there has been a project called the 5000 Project. Its focus before the Pandemic was the physical nourishment of the most vulnerable in society—those without a place to call home. Yet, over the years in a quiet way, through the relationships forged, there was spiritual nourishment too of both those who came to be served and those who served. Since the Pandemic, with other agencies having taken on the services the project provided, the question is now being asked, "who is God calling us to feed and how?" There is still the call to physically feed people, but there is also a strong sense of call to provide spiritual nourishment. And this is not something to be done by only one person, but by the whole community.

Prayer

Jesus said:
Humanity cannot live on bread alone,
the Word of God must also nourish.
Lord God, you call us to enable this:
to provide for those who are hungry
in body, mind and soul.
Help us to serve those in need—
physically and spiritually—
as we serve each other
as your people together
through Jesus Christ,
the one who provides nourishment
and sustains it by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

may we enter your gates with praise,
and go from your courts to serve you in the poor,
the lost and the wandering,
encouraged and strengthened by your Holy Spirit,
today and every day. Amen.

Monday 18 July 2022 St John 20: 19-23

Sue Knight - Local Church Leader, Reigate Park Church. Lay Preaching Commissioner Southern Synod

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'
Reflection

We normally think, in Holy Week, about the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus and what it all means.

We normally associate the giving of the 'Holy Spirit' in Acts at Pentecost with images of fire, prayers offered in multiple languages, and attention to the Church's prophetic vocation.

"The Johannine Pentecost," as this passage is sometimes called, gets much less attention.

That makes sense, since in John's Gospel Jesus does not impart the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Here, the Spirit comes at Easter, during Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance to a collection of his followers. (Earlier in the day, outside the tomb, he spoke to and commissioned only

Mary Magdalene.) Also, in this passage we encounter the Spirit with less of a universal tone (in comparison to Acts); the focus here is more particular, focused on the identity and sending of a community.

The close connections John draws among Jesus' promises about the Spirit, his glorification and ascension, his intimacy with the Father, and his commissions to his followers caution us not to skip over "the Johannine Pentecost" too casually, as if it serves merely as a final "Goodbye, and good luck" from Jesus to his friends.

Receiving the Spirit, the Church receives Jesus. And so the Church receives Jesus' own capacity to make God manifest, bringing light to the world. The Trinitarian intimacy inferred from John's presentation of these ideas is striking, but even more so is the intimacy expressed between the Divine and humanity.

Such intimacy between God and us is but one consequence of the rich Easter confession about what happens when God raises a corpse to new life. Jesus lives, yes–not apart from us, but in and through us.
Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you meet us every day, just as you met your disciples after your resurrection.

We thank you that your victory of good over evil, love over hate and life over death made such a difference to the lives of the disciples just as it continues to make such a difference to our lives today.

And we praise you that for each of us there is always the promise of new beginnings. Amen

Tuesday 19 July 2022 St John 20: 24 - 29

The Rev'd Clare Downing, Wessex Synod Moderator

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with

Thursday 21 July 2022 St John 21: 15 - 19

The Rev'd Dr Elaine Colechin, Minister, Bromley United Reformed Church and St Mark's United Church, Greenwich

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Reflection

Yesterday we heard how the disciples physically sustained the community that had drawn together around Jesus and continued to live together past Jesus' resurrection. And as Jesus sat down for breakfast with disciples who had gone fishing, we were reminded of the physical and spiritual feeding that so often went hand-in-hand as Jesus sat with his disciples. Yet do we see these acts of feeding in or as part of our calling as church communities or personally?

In these four verses of John's gospel, there is no ignoring the reconciliation between Jesus and Peter after Peter's denial of Jesus. In response to the three denials, there are three proclamations of Peter's love for Jesus. Across these three exchanges, Peter found forgiveness, saw his relationship with Jesus restored and heard again the call. The call, however, was not just to follow; it was also to feed. And as we saw from

We know the disciples had a common purse and some of its contents, like church bank accounts, would have come from wealthy benefactors and donations. Yet they would have had to earn some of its contents too. There is a lot to be said for trusting that there will be enough in the purse to ensure the community is fed, but at no point did Jesus plant a money tree! Going fishing, therefore, was possibly just those disciples who were fishermen going out to make a few pounds to ensure the physical needs of the community were met. There are necessities in life and they must be paid for. Whether a community with a building or without, there are bills to pay and the money needs to be raised to pay them.

Yet, what of the elusive catch—of their nets remaining empty until Jesus turns up? Does that not suggest that we should only put our trust in God? The disciples had to re-lower the nets; the fish did not jump into the boat by themselves. Jesus' presence, however, reminded them what their catch was to sustain—a community that would enable others to know and believe.

Prayer

Sustaining God,
you know our needs and you provide:
you show us where to cast our nets;
you give us vision and perspective.
Help us not to seek more than we need,
or look for what is not necessary.
Remind us of our mission:
to faithfully follow
and enable others to come to know
and believe in Jesus Christ,
Saviour and Lord. Amen

them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Reflection

I feel for Thomas.

We don't know a huge amount about him, but we are aware that he has two monikers. The first one is 'the twin', and I wonder whether, like other twins of my acquaintance, he got fed up with being known and referred to in relation to a sibling, rather than as an individual. Then there's the second nickname, which comes from this Gospel passage – 'doubting'.

In recent years, the term FOMO has found its way into our language – the fear of missing out. For Thomas, even without the pressures of social media, it wasn't so much a fear, but an experience of missing out big time. He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of Easter Day. He didn't have that 'Johannine Pentecost' experience which the others received. I can imagine him thinking that his friends were cracking up under the strain of the previous few day when they reported the encounter. In the circumstances, a 'questioning Thomas' is pretty understandable. Like any good researcher, he wanted some empirical evidence.

A week later, our questioning Thomas has his own encounter with the risen Jesus. Whilst Jesus invites him to test the evidence, there's nothing to say whether Thomas actually touched the wounds. What we do know

is that his questions are answered by this experience. His response is something of a parallel with Peter's response to Jesus question "who do you say I am?" But while Peter talks of "the Christ, the son of the living God", Thomas makes it personal; "My Lord and my God" – a statement of belief.

I'm a fan of Thomas – not so much the doubting twin, but the questioning and believing Thomas.

Prayer

Risen Christ,
Help us, as we ask questions
to be open to your answers.
Give us the assurance of your resurrection,
and help us, with Thomas,
to proclaim you as our Lord, and our God.
Amen

Wednesday 20 July 2022 St John 20: 30 - 21: 14

The Rev'd Dr Elaine Colechin, Minister, Bromley United Reformed Church and St Mark's United Church, Greenwich

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But 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. After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Reflection

John's gospel is brought to a close and then there is a prologue—the story is not quite over.

As the seven disciples go fruitlessly fishing, it could be perceived that none of what they had seen meant anything to them. With Jesus not there 24/7, telling them what to do or where to go, they slipped back into their old lives. The sabbatical was enlightening, maybe even a little fun, but now back to the grindstone and the daily life they knew.

But was this 'going fishing' really slipping back into old ways? Was it really a resignation from all that they had come to know and believe in the previous three years?