ST MARYS
NANTWICH

Lent Course 2026

The Gospel according to St John

Week 2

Correction:

The back page of the NIV copy of John's Gospel you have been given for this course has this advertising blurb:

"John's Gospel tells the complete story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ"

Open the back cover and read the last verse of the Gospel:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (21.25)

And then see the last verse of the previous chapter (an earlier ending of the Gospel):

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. (20.30,31)

John's Gospel clearly isn't even a "complete" story of the earthly life of Jesus. And according to the perspective of the opening of chapter 1, Jesus does everything.

If you start reading the Gospel, and writing an account of what Jesus has done, then Jesus is doing something new that you've got to write down, if you want a complete account… and so on…

And this matters because as we read here the story of Jesus, we find it is written so we have to think about our story – and our story as a continuation of, and participation in, the story of Jesus. For example…

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (14.12)

What's missing?

- Birth narrative
- Baptism
- Transfiguration
- The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Why? A common answer is that the other, earlier Gospels have covered these, so John is giving space to other matters.

This is true, but Rowan Williams suggests there's something more. In the synoptics, the glory is revealed at the transfiguration, but in John, it's there throughout – see 1.14, and we'll come back to this theme of glory in later weeks. The whole is a story of incarnation, and of having come down, a continuous baptism into this world.

And the whole of chapter 6, read this week, is a reflection on feeding on the Word of God, receiving Christ's life into ourselves – a reference to the Eucharist, but also to what the whole of life is about.

Misunderstandings

A key literary device through the Gospel is that people hear the surface meaning of the words of Jesus and miss the point:

The Temple (2:19–22): Jesus refers to his body, but the listeners think he means the physical Herod's Temple.
Born Again (3:3–4): Nicodemus interprets "born from above" as entering a second time into the mother's womb.
Living Water (4:10–15): The Samaritan woman thinks of physical water from a well, not a source of eternal life.
Food (4:31–34): The disciples believe someone brought Jesus physical food, while he refers to doing God's will.
Bread of Life (6:32–53): The crowd misinterprets Jesus's teaching on the "bread from heaven" as physical food, then struggles with the concept of "eating his flesh".
Freedom (8:31–33): Listeners take Jesus's promise of truth setting them free to mean political or social emancipation.
Death (8:51–53): The audience believes Jesus means they will never physically die.
Lazarus's Sleep (11:12): The disciples believe Lazarus is resting, not dead.

This creates dramatic irony, where readers know more than the characters in the story. We are also prompted always to be ready to look for deeper meaning in what Jesus is saying. And are we prompted to trust that there's a deeper level of understanding of our own lives?

Some of the Questions in John

Chapters 5-7

Do you want to be made well? (5.6)

Does this offend you? (6.61)

Do you also wish to go away? (6.67)

To whom can we go? (6.68)

Did I not choose you? (6.70)

Have you also been deceived? (7.47)

Thoughts and questions for us:

- Work through the above questions and look at the context. Can we hear them being asked by us now, or asked of us now? How can they be answered? Are any answers found in the text?
- What have you found fresh, inspiring, or encouraging in these chapters?
- What have you found difficult or disturbing?
- How does chapter 6 relate to Holy Communion?
- Last week we encountered the question "What are you looking for?" – a theme that runs through the Gospel. How do these chapters point to answers?