

Contexts

John's Gospel – in brief

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 20:19-31 – things to notice

- It is the evening of the day of resurrection – the first day of the week is a reference to the day we now know as Sunday.
- This Gospel is in 2 parts: The appearance to the disciples (note, not just the Apostles) and Jesus' appearance to Thomas – 2 separate but related and linked stories.

Part 1: Appearance to the disciples

- The disciples are gathered in a room with closed doors 'for fear of the Jews' – this does not necessarily mean that any Jews are obviously threatening them. It probably only means that the disciples themselves were afraid of what *might* happen.
- Jesus comes and stands among them – he does not enter through the door.
- His first words are: Peace and he shows them his hands and side (proof that he really is Jesus)
- The disciples are overjoyed – note there is no hint of doubt (as in Luke) or hesitation.
- Jesus commissions the disciples: "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you..." The disciples are now to represent Jesus to the world.
- He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit". Note the difference in Luke where the Holy Spirit will not be given for 40 more days.
- "For those who sins you forgive they are forgiven...." It is not easy to understand this verse exactly since the Gospel of John only ever speaks of sin as unbelief. This should NOT be understood as the power to forgive sins being entrusted to a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation. "This 'power' of forgiveness is probably expressed in the bestowing of the Spirit on those who believe as a result of the disciples' mission and who join the community, rather than a process of dealing with Christians who have committed sin (as in Matthew 18:19)" – Jerome Biblical

Commentary. That is to say, Jesus' ministry of announcing God's forgiveness of sin continues through the ministry of the disciples.

Part 2: Appearance to Thomas

- Thomas demands proof.
- 8 days later the disciples are together again in the house & Thomas is with them.
- As in the appearance to the disciples, the doors are once more closed, but Jesus comes in.
- Once again Jesus' greeting is, "Peace be with you".
- Jesus invites Thomas to believe – "Put your finger here... doubt no longer, but believe".
- Thomas confession of faith (belief) – "My Lord and my God" – is also the high point of the Gospel's Christology – the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord and God.
- Thomas is not reprimanded by Jesus. The dialogue here is about whether one actually needs to have physically seen the risen Jesus in order to come to faith.
- Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet believed – all those who faith is grounded in the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit.
- The final lines of this Sunday's Gospel appear to be the original conclusion of John's Gospel. Chapter 21 was appended later.
- It speaks of many other signs done by Jesus, but the ones recorded here in this Gospel are given so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ) and the Son of God, and that in believing this, you may life through his name (eternal life).

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The great Easter Feast of last Sunday begins a fifty-day celebration of the Resurrection in the life of the Church concluding with the feast of Pentecost in six weeks' time – the Easter Season.

Each Sunday during the Easter Season the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings tell the story of the first group of believers: their life and faith, how they witnessed to the risen Lord, and the hardships and struggles they endured.

The second reading each Sunday is from the book of Revelation (or Apocalypse). Apocalypse means 'revelation'. The book is filled with visions and symbols, the meaning of which can be obscure to us. It was meant as a text to encourage Christian communities under persecution, to reassure them that the power of good will ultimately triumph. The author names himself as 'John' but exactly who he was is still a mystery.

The Gospel of each Sunday is always from John except for the feast of the Ascension.

Easter Sunday: Jesus, risen from the dead

2nd Sunday: Jesus appears to the disciples & to Thomas

3rd Sunday: Jesus appears to the disciples again, by the sea and eats and drinks with them

4th Sunday: Jesus, the good shepherd, source of life

5th Sunday: Jesus' command to love

6th Sunday: The Spirit will come

Ascension: Jesus commissions the eleven (from Luke's Gospel)

Pentecost: The Spirit will teach you.

The second Sunday of Easter is the 'octave' of the feast.

The first reading speaks about the first community of believers and how the influence of their lives and prayer affected those around them and brought about many cures.

The second reading records John's first vision and his mission including the encouraging words, "Do not be afraid, it is I ... the living one.'

The Gospel tells the story of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples after his resurrection and the conversion of (doubting) Thomas.

The stories about the faith and intense missionary activity of the early church challenge us in our own day to ask ourselves about how we reach out to and evangelise the community in whose midst we live. We do not exist primarily for ourselves who are already in the community. We exist primarily for those who are not.

May the new life we celebrate over the next fifty days bring us the creativity of Spirit we need to be the living heart of God in our world today.