

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 15:1-8 – things to notice

- Begins with a statement about Jesus: I am the true vine.
- In OT literature the image of Israel as God's vine appears often. Israel is called to be the true vine of God in the world. John presents Jesus as the true vine.
- Another borrowing from familiar agricultural imagery: Jesus is the vine, God is the vinedresser who prunes the branches (us) to help them bear even more fruit.
- The image is one of union (or communion) – the vine and the branches are one.
- God prunes the vine through the words of Jesus. Note that the disciples are not in danger of being pruned – they are pruned already (very reassuring!).
- 'Make your home in me as I make mine in you – a very powerful image of intimacy. Note to 2-way relationship signalled by 'as I make mine in you'.
- In order to bear fruit a branch must remain part of (connected to) the vine. The branch draws nourishment and life from the vine, which enable the branch to bear fruit.
- Note that the branch is not just passively drawing life from the vine. It does so in order to *produce fruit in plenty*.
- 'I am the vine, you are the branches' makes obvious the analogy applies to disciples.
- Cut off from Jesus there is no life. Like a branch that is thrown away he/she withers and dies. The fire imagery underlines the complete absence of life for those who cease to be part of the vine.
- '... you may ask what you will...' This is not asking to win Tattslotto! The next sentence makes obvious that it about asking for what is needed in order to bear much fruit.
- Finally, 'It is to the glory of my father...' here the idea is that when the disciples bear fruit they both become the glory of the father and true disciples, and give glory to God by the fruitful lives they live. *Bearing fruit* contains the idea of being Jesus in the world.

The Easter Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for the Third Sunday of Easter?

In a sense, the Easter Gospels are a meditation about Jesus – who he is, what he is about, so that the disciples (the church) may learn how to continue his mission & ministry. The Spirit of Jesus is still incarnated in a physical body (ours) and communicated through the physical.

- Sunday 2: Jesus visits the disciples in the room & gives them the Holy Spirit (the power to proclaim forgiveness of God) Jesus appears again to the disciples & to Thomas.
- Sunday 3: Jesus visits the disciples – Luke 24:35-48 (preaching repentance for forgiveness of sins)
- Sunday 4: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the true shepherd – John 10:11-18
- Sunday 5: Jesus, the true vine – the vine & branches – Jesus, source of life – John 15:1-8
- Sunday 6: Jesus the true friend - No greater love / you are my friends / Jesus commissions disciples to bear fruit / Jesus' commandment to love – John 15:9-17

Reflection

We are still on the Easter journey. After the three-day roller-coaster of emotions - from Jesus' supper with his disciples, through trial and crucifixion, to the wonder of the women at the empty tomb - we now prepare ourselves to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

During these fifty days, our journey is steadied and enlightened by hearing the First Letter of St John. It has a central message made clear in today's reading: we are asked to believe in Jesus and love one another. We are then assured that we are not alone in this challenge: "We know that he lives in us by the Spirit that he has given us."

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins echoes this in *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*:

"For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his."

This idea of Christ living within us is explored in today's Gospel where Jesus likens himself to the "true vine." He tells us: "Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty."

Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can hold Christ within us, not only in our thoughts, our ideas, our actions, but deep within ourselves, in our souls and in our hearts. We are helped by prayer and by reflecting on the words of scripture, maybe meditating on the images, or by spending time with the phrases that we particularly notice. Or we can sit still and simply open our hearts and listen. Jesus says: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you ..."