

Contexts

John's Gospel

- **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.

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)

John 15:9-17 – things to notice

- This Sunday's Gospel is a direct continuation of last Sunday's Gospel.
- This section follows the washing of the feet and is part of a long meditation on the meaning of Jesus' life which includes Jesus predicting his betrayal, Peter's denial, Jesus the Way to the Father, the Promise of the Holy Spirit and Jesus, the true Vine.
- We are in the Book of Glory – pre-resurrection sayings of Jesus and this Sunday's Gospel is the conclusion of the section on Jesus, the true vine which talks about the deep intimacy of communion with God. Note that in the image of the vine there is no distinguishing the vine from its branches: the vine is the branches.
- Beginning: Jesus' love for the disciples is also a communion of love with the Father, Jesus tells the disciples to 'remain in my love' then tells them how: by keeping his commandments (to love) just as he (Jesus) has kept the Father's commandment to love.
- Keep my commandments – is keeping the commandment of love (not law).
- Abiding in love is the source of Jesus' joy and will be the source of the disciples' joy.
- Love one another as I have loved you – love draws us into friendship with Jesus and with one another.
- This is the sort of love Jesus is talking about: that which enables one to lay down their life for a friend. Note that there are many ways to lay down one's life. Jesus will lay down his life on the Cross, but he has already laid it down throughout his life and ministry in service of others and in the symbolic action of washing the disciples' feet. His command to 'Wash each other's feet' is about humble service.
- Love draws us into intimate friendship with Jesus.
- This experience transforms us from being slaves to being friends and brings full knowledge of God and God's purpose – a communion of knowledge: 'I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.'
- "I chose you" – note: not the other way around – 'to go out and bear fruit that will last'. The disciple is called to be an instrument of transformation for others by drawing them into the same communion of love, friendship and knowledge of God.
- The key to entering into this communion and to bearing fruit that will last is deep love of one another.

- Finally, the commandment of Jesus is to 'do' love.

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 and communicated through the physical – real human beings.

- Sunday 2: Jesus visits the disciples in the room & gives them the Holy Spirit (the power to proclaim forgiveness of God) – John 20:19-31. Note: same Gospel for all 3 Years.
- Sunday 3: Jesus visits the disciples again – Luke 24:35-48 (preaching repentance for forgiveness of sins)
- Sunday 4: Jesus, the Good (true) Shepherd – John 10:11-18
- Sunday 5: Jesus the true vine – John 15:1-8
- This Sunday: Jesus the true friend - No greater love / you are my friends / Jesus commissions disciples to bear fruit – love one another (final command)
- Next Sunday is Ascension, so this is a kind of final meditation offered by the church, a kind of 'summary' passage; a collection a various images (all worth meditating on in their own right) and partly a preparation for the story of Jesus' return to the Father (next Sunday). Jesus returns to the Father, but these words should keep ringing in the ears of the disciples.

Reflection

The command by Jesus for us to love one another is at the heart of this week's readings. In these few straightforward words Jesus not only showed us how to treat other people, he showed us the way to live full and happy lives. "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete." The disciple is called to abide in love with God and others.

Jesus' whole life was about being God's love in the world. That also becomes the mission of the disciple in this passage.

Jesus tells his disciples that they are his friends. They have become his friends because Jesus has shared his knowledge and understanding and love of the Father with them: "Everything I have learnt from my Father..."

There is a long Old Testament tradition that the 'friends' of God are those who are wise – who have learned and understood the truth about God. That tradition is referred to in these words which John puts on the lips of Jesus. Jesus' sharing with the disciples his knowledge and love of God has made them wise and friends, not slaves, of God.

'Slavery' appears in the idea of laying down one's life for others. There is a kind of reversal here: from being slave or servants of God, to being *friends* of God and *servants* of one another.

When Jesus says he has told the disciples everything he has *learned* from the Father it reminds us that Jesus was human as well as divine; that his life was a journey of learning, too; a path of facing choices and challenges.

In the First Reading from The Acts of the Apostles, we hear the results of Peter's renewed faith when he proclaims the revolutionary insight that God *does not have favourites*, that anyone of any nationality who respects God and does what is right is part of God's family.

We remain in Christ by remaining in his love and loving one another just as Christ has loved us. We are no longer servants but friends of Jesus because he has made known to us everything he learnt from God. Jesus has chosen us and commissioned us to be love and to do love in the heart of the world.