

Lenten Studies 2024

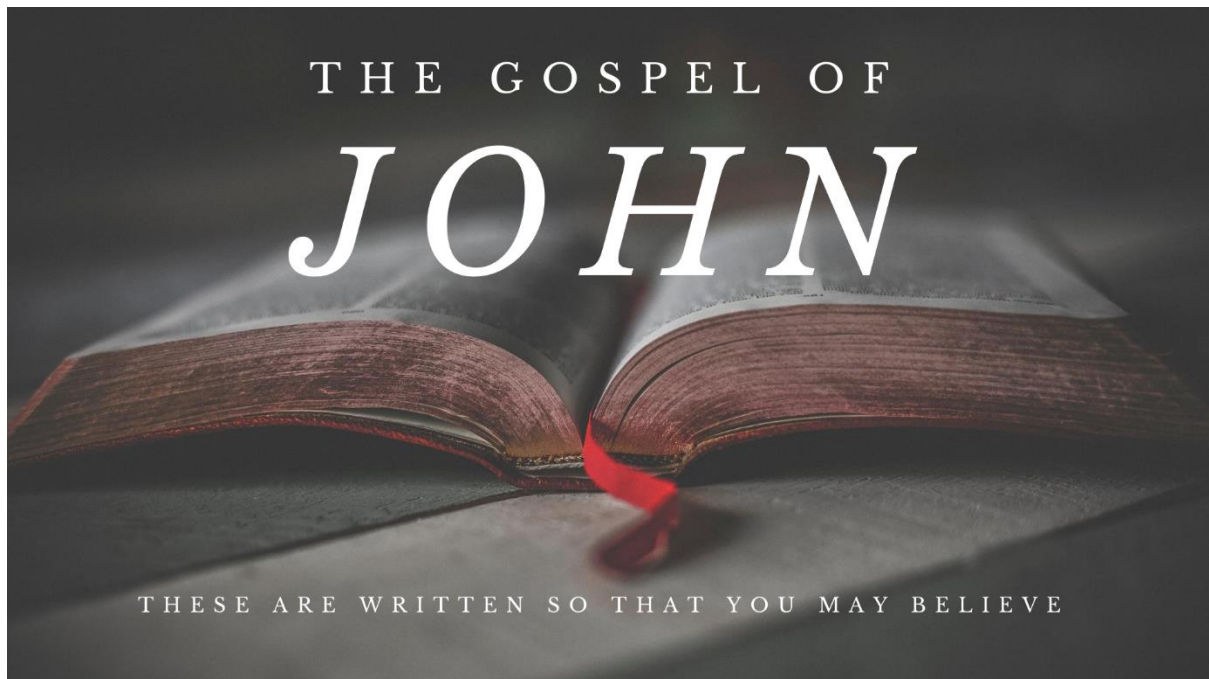
A Journey through the Gospel of John



Written by Fr Daniel

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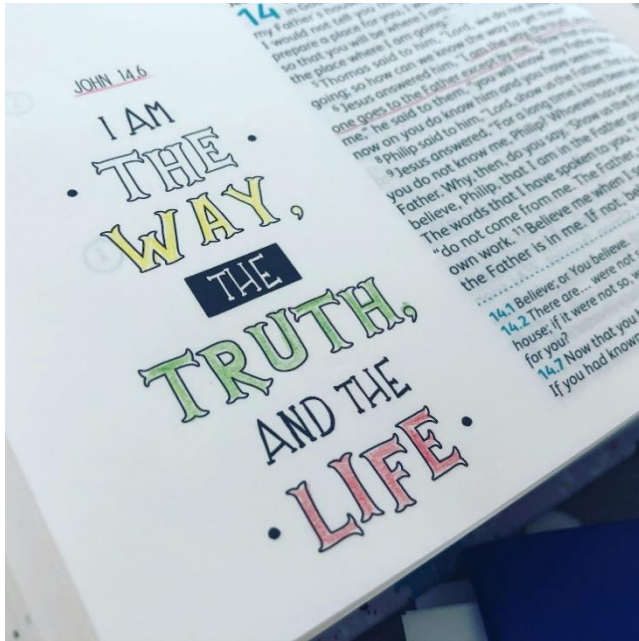
Why JOHN'S Gospel?



John is one of the **disciples of Jesus**; it is 4th book in the New Testament. The name John means “**God has been gracious or merciful**”. He is the son of Zebedee and Salome. He was also the younger brother of James. Salome supported Jesus’s ministry financially. John was a Jew from Galilee and apparently from a wealthy family. (Mark 15.40-41).

We meet John and James together with their father, as they are preparing their nets on the seashore, at the time **Jesus called them to follow him**. (Matt4.18.22) John was a disciple of John the Baptist before Jesus called him. (John 1.19)

John was one who was part of **the inner circle of Jesus**. Jesus took aside Peter, James, and John often. The “inner circle” had many different experiences with Jesus, quite different to those of the remaining disciples. John is not only in the inner circle of Jesus, but he was also known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. (John 13.23, 24)



After the resurrection of Jesus, John continued to play an important role in the church with Peter. Gal 2.9, Acts 3.1-11, Acts 4. 1-23 acts 8.14-24,

Among the disciples of Jesus, all of them died as martyrs, except for John, who had instead a natural death in his old age. He was exiled to the island of Patmos, and returned to Ephesus upon his release,

where he stayed until his death.

He has played a very important role in the New Testament writing a total number of **21 chapters and a total of 879 verses.**

In this book we read about the **maturity of John**, his great experience with Jesus, his intimacy with God, which is indirectly revealed in this book. The book of John has a unique feature. Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, Mark wrote for the Roman audience, Luke wrote for the Greek and other audiences, but **John wrote his Gospel intending it for the whole world.** By doing so, John made a direct link between the nature of God and the nature of Jesus Christ, who is portrayed as the word from the beginning. Matthew identifies Jesus as the Messiah, Mark portrays Jesus as the servant, whilst in Luke we read of Jesus as the Son of man. John **focuses on the deity of Christ** more than the others do, with quite an emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God.

John 20.31 reveals the purpose of writing this book, - "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. "

John is very clear with his aim as he wrote this Gospel. His Gospel is quite different. He does not present everything as a sequential series of events. Rather he takes events and sayings from here and there to make his point in **showing whom Jesus really is**. He doesn't need to record what Jesus did, where he went and what he spoke to the people. We do find "I am ... "sayings. The Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) record the parables but not in John. **He includes 5 miracles** in this Gospel that are not included in the Synoptic gospels. **John recalls these miracles as signs that Jesus is the Son of God.**

John also revealed the **humanity of Jesus** in this book. Jesus wept, Jesus was hungry, we feel his pain, and walk with him to his death. Although he mentions Jesus as the Son of God at the same time, he takes the time to mention that Jesus also took on a human form. **Jesus is divine and human.** In those days, the Gnostics groups (Greek philosophers) believed that Jesus is God and appeared as a man, but that he was not fully man. In this book John differed from that viewpoint to show that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human.

Now it's time to ask for your forgiveness. When we follow the lectionary readings, especially in the season of Lent, we will have John's gospel as the appointed gospel readings, for years A B and C. For year A and C, the gospel passage is very long, so mostly I have not covered all that I am supposed to preach through the gospel. By writing this, I am asking forgiveness for not covering the whole gospel. When you read this study in its greater detail, this will be my absolution from this sin.

Enjoy walking with John.

Fr Daniel

2024

Lenten Study one The Stone Jars

John 2.1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."⁴ "Woman,^[a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.^[b]⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.



Read this passage through three times.

First time - just read through and then take two minutes in silence to ponder it,

Second time - read and pick one word that speaks to you, write it down.

On your third reading, pick a line or sentence that speaks to you and write it down.

The Stone Jars speaks-

Please hear our story,

There were six of us, and we were holding water for the ritual cleaning. Jews always use us to keep water outside the house for the party hall. They clean their feet, legs, and hands before they eat any food. Our job is holding water and staying outside all day long in the hot sun and even in the cold winter. But on this occasion, there was a wedding taking place in Cana of Galilee - that was where we were for the job. It seemed to be a great wedding; many people came and of course it was busy for us too. But I had sharp ears, so I pricked up my ears to listen to all the gossip.

You all know that Jewish weddings go on for a whole week, the main day normally on the Wednesday night. The bride and groom have been treated like a queen and king with their flower crowns and their bridal robes. They went out into the streets to receive blessings from the whole village. Sometimes it lasts up until midnight. In the wedding wine was essential, without wine there is no joy, according to Jewish cultures. Wine jars were greatly respected. They always have an important place at the wedding party just because they make people happy. They receive special treatment and have a special place. We wish we could be one of the wine Jars not a lowly water jar, whom no one respects.

In this wedding, they have invited Jesus and his friends; Jesus seems to be popular person in the village. For me he seems to be a normal guy with bright eyes, and he is a very gentle person. His mother was also invited to the wedding, and like all the guests, they are here having fun. Suddenly Jesus' mother, Mary called him over and whispered to him that the wine is running out. It was a big shock for



us, because running out of wine will bring ill repute to the family, it will show that they are not hospitable and not paying true respect to their guests. If this is true, they will remember this for years. It will be the greatest shame for the bride's family.

I heard that they had already secretly mixed water with the wine to serve the people but still it is not enough. Jesus' mother pleaded with him saying that they don't have any more wine, but Jesus' response was not at all helpful. He just said, "his time has not yet arrived". What is he saying? What does it mean? But his mother took no notice of him. She went ahead and called the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus says, just do it. The servants were waiting for his order. A few minutes later Jesus looked at the servants and told them to fill up the stone jars with water, right to the brim.

We were six of us, and there were no other stone jars, and we are very big and heavy for just one person to carry. Right now, we are empty because so many people, all the guests, have already used us. When Jesus gave his order, we thought more people must have been coming to the wedding. And for this, we were not very happy because it means we must stay much longer just baking in the hot sun.

When the servants poured water into us, we all enjoyed the very nice cool water, cooling us down. As they poured in the water, it changed us into a bright red colour, not our dull brown. It was a great change in us. Then Jesus said to the servants, "Please give it to the master to taste." The servants were terrified. But, oh yes, this water, this cooling water had become wine. The Master tasted the wine and he exclaimed, "This is the best wine ever!!". He called the servants to bring all of us in. Oh, what joy! We are now in the party hall, and for once people cared about us and showed us humble water jars lots of respect. What a change!

I was wondering about what we had heard Jesus exclaim, "my time has not come yet". But Mary, his mother, is the one who realized his time had indeed come to reveal himself. She pressed him to do this. And all the important people I think had enough wine, but people who are the less privileged perhaps did not get enough. It may be a big treat for them. Jesus said his time is not yet come, which means

he may be waiting for all the important people to have their treat and he may be waiting for the less privileged people to enjoy the treat.



As the new wine arrived, joy filled the wedding party again.

- The water changed to wine (but only the servants knew).
- For the stone jar, when Jesus looked at them, their life has been changed.
- We were outside the house, he made us come inside the house, into the best part.
- The people did not respect us but now we were given an honor as we were taken inside the house.
- We were carrying water to clean the dirty parts - feet and hands, but now we are holding wine which brings great joy to people.
- Water refreshes the body, but wine refreshes the soul.
- This is the first sign Jesus did and revealed his glory, we are proud that we also part of it.



Questions

- 1) What did the disciples see when Jesus gave this gift, the new wine, an abundant and gracious gift? What do you see?

- 2) How can this miracle which speaks of transformation and new possibility impact our lives, can we too be transformed and see new possibilities?

- 3) Can you think of a time when you felt like the stone jars – left outside, not valued, - what was it like?

- 4) How did this miracle reshape the understanding of Jesus for his disciples? What new revelations did this miracle uncover for the disciples and for us to know about Jesus?

Lenten Study Two The Well Speaks

John 4.1-29, 39-42

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman

4 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.^[a]) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you

now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”
¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” ²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

Many Samaritans Believe

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Read this passage through three times.

First time - just read through and then have two minutes silence,

Second time - read and pick one word that speaks to you, write it down.

On your third reading, pick a line or sentence that speaks to you and write it down.



The Well speaks -

I am the “Well” given by Jacob to his son Joseph. I have a very long historical background. I have seen a lot of generations using me. Some people I remember but not everyone. One particular day stands out in my memory. It was about noon when a man called Jesus came and sat down near me. He may have been thirsty or hungry, I didn’t know. He looked like he was waiting for someone to come along.

And then, here comes my lady. Now noon is the hottest time of the day, and I don’t know why she would come out then, but she always comes in the middle of the day. No Jewish or Samaritan woman would come at this time of day. It is midday, and it is hot and humid, but despite this, she always comes at this time. The usual girls who come from the village arrive in groups, and then they can do their own thing – gossiping, laughing, and joking with each other. I used to enjoy the time listening to them; it is how I got all the news about the village. But this one lady comes alone and leaves alone.

Now this is when it became quite surprising to me. Jesus asked her to give him a drink. I was shocked. A good Jew would never talk to their sisters, mother or other females in public! But this man talks to a girl from Samaria and asked her for a drink of water. Then this girl said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”. Well, I was amazed at her response, after all, he just asked for water, all she needed to say was a yes or no. But instead, she seems to be challenging him.

Oh, this clever Jesus responded to her, saying, “If you know the gift of God.... he would have given you living water.” But once again she challenged him, saying, “Sir you have no bucket. Are you greater than Jacob?”.

I was bit confused because she called him ‘sir’. In her first response she had given him no respect but now things are changing, and she

regards him differently. Jesus answered her, saying something about giving a spring of water which would gush up into eternal life. She immediately asks him to give that water, so she would not need to come here to the well. Boy, this was getting interesting. Jesus, it seems he was very clever, and he asked her to bring her husband. However, immediately she responded, "I have no husband". Nevertheless, Jesus said, "Yes, you had five husbands before, but this one is not your husband. You have spoken correctly".

Again, she said, "You are a prophet!". It immediately changed the subject to worship. She mentioned about the Jewish and Samaritan ways of worship. A woman who is Samaritan talking about worship? 'What is happening in this Jewish culture? How come Jesus accepts this questioning from her? I listened further and Jesus did not stop her, rather he was encouraging her to speak more. It is all very surprising to me. This encounter with a woman, and encouraging her to talk, empowering her with the great truth of worship, which is God is the Holy Spirit and truth. People have mentioned that he was talking to one of the great Pharisees, Nicodemus, a teacher. But now it seems to be that he is spending more time talking to this lady than he spent time with Nicodemus.

This woman seems to be denying Jesus could have any authority, saying, "ah, but when the Messiah comes he will teach us everything." But Jesus responded to her quite simply, saying that "he, he himself was the Messiah". I am in a real mess after hearing this. Jesus had not revealed himself to anyone so far, not even to his disciples, or his parents, not even to Nicodemus. But he revealed himself to this person, a woman in disgrace. She had gradually found him as a Messiah, a Jewish man, called him sir, and recognized him as a prophet and then as the true Messiah. I think her encounter with Jesus, his encouragement, and his empowerment of her helped her to understand him better.

But then comes the ultimate climax.

All his disciples came back; and they were shocked to see him talking to this woman. But she left her water jar near the well and ran back to the city. What an enormous change in her life. Now, I think she left the jar beside me at the well to symbolize how she left her old lifestyle near this well itself. With Jesus's words of empowerment, she was able to go running off joyfully to the city to tell others of her encounter. She had arrived at the well in the middle of the day because she was afraid of people, hiding from them, but now she is running towards the people.



What a change in her life, just a few minutes talking with Jesus has empowered this woman to face the challenges in her life.

- A woman who came alone now went back with great courage to meet people.
- She did not tell the people, here is the Messiah but rather asked them to check for themselves, he cannot be the Messiah, can he? If she had declared, “He is the Messiah”, people would not have taken her seriously, but the way she expressed it in turn motivated people to come and see Jesus.
- She is the first woman who witnessed Jesus and became the first evangelist.
- Because of her witnessing, the whole village came to Jesus, they accepted this Jew and he stayed with them for two days.
- Imagine when Jews do not even walk through the road where a Samaritan lives, but Jesus and his disciples were welcomed by them and then stayed with them.
- The people found that Jesus is the Savior of the world through this one woman’s witness. She brought the whole city to Christ.

Questions

- 1) Discuss as a group – “the word of salvation takes root in the hearts of the despised and marginalized, and it grows into a great harvest”.. just like this woman who brought the whole people to Jesus.
- 2) This woman was thirsty, a thirst to know the truth. What do we thirst for in this world of great excess and unmeasured needs?

How much is enough and when do we cross the line into too much?

- 3) We know the demands of our cultures and are acquainted with the circumstances of our lives, so how do we reconcile the grace offered to us?
- 4) Jesus crosses the boundaries of gender, culture, and religion. How many times do we allow this character of Jesus to shine through us?

Listen to this song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmt5VNnrJIM>

I stand amazed by Shane and Shane

How marvellous, how wonderful
And my song will ever be
How marvellous, how wonderful
Is my Savior's love for me

He took my sins and my sorrows
He made them His very own
He bore the burden to Calvary
He suffered and died for me

Oh, how marvellous, how wonderful
And my song shall ever be
How marvellous, how wonderful
Is my Savior's love

Forever I will sing Your praise
Jesus, Risen King
Oh, my God, I stand amazed
That You loved me

How Marvelous, how wonderful
And my song shall ever be
How marvellous, how wonderful
Is my Savior's love

How marvellous, how wonderful
And my song shall ever be
How marvellous, how wonderful
Is my Savior's love for me

Lenten Study three The boy speaks.



This is the only miracle described in all four gospels, which emphasizes the powerful effect it must have had on the gospel writers.

Please read one by one from the 4 passages.
Matthew 14.13-21, Mark 6.31-44, Luke 9.12-17,
and John 6.1-14

From Matthew

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

From Mark**Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages^[e]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.” ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

From Luke**Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing. ¹² Late in the

afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." ¹³ He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." ¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. ¹⁶ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Form John

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

6 Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages^[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.



The boy speaks-

"I am from the village near Tiberius. My friends and I heard that Jesus was coming through our way, and so we decided to see him. We have all heard about Jesus. We know that he is a miracle worker after all the people he has healed. He has even treated people with demonic power! We know that he always loves children, and he is such a good storyteller too.

People used to follow him around in the thousands and they sat near to hear his preaching. He was always telling us small stories to ponder.

Today my mother gave me five small barley breads and two salted fish. We are very poor; do not have enough money to buy wheat, so we always have barley breads, which is crunchy too. Sometimes Mum is not able to prepare it in the way Jewish people should prepare their food. But I took it anyway, just in case he keeps on preaching, and I get hungry, then I can share it with my friends too.

We all followed along and we were able to sit close to Jesus and his disciples. We were near the beach, where there is a little hill, Jesus went up onto the hill to speak to us. Although there is a huge crowd, we can all hear his words, he is a majestic speaker. We were all enthralled by what he had to say.

The time has passed quicky and now It is almost evening. Suddenly Jesus was asking one of his disciples, I think it was Philip, “where are we to buy bread for these people?” (Read Matthew 14. 15-17). Philip told Jesus that even if they spent all the money they had, they could not buy enough bread to feed even a little for each person there. His reaction was completely normal; we thought Jesus was asking him where we could buy the food. Because it was festival time, most Jews from the age of 12 visit Jerusalem at this time. Consequently, all the food shops increase their prices so it would be very expensive. And it was a huge crowd to feed yet alone jostle with the crowds to go and find some food. And just think of how much food they would need – even a small lad like me could eat more than my five loaves of bread! Then I noticed another disciple, the one who is always cheeky and funny. He came to us to check if anyone had any food. Of course, at first, I was hesitant to give anything, because my food was the food of the poor, not the tasty bread of the rich. But then I considered that maybe Jesus really needed it, after all he has been preaching and healing all this time. He really does need my food, and so we decided to forsake our dinner to give my food to Andrew to take it for Jesus.

Andrew said to everyone that we have five loaves of bread and two small fish. Then Jesus asked his disciples to make the people sit in rows. So, all the people started whispering to each other and finally they sat down in rows. We



were excited as we thought Jesus was going to come and touch us all, because everyone wanted to be touched by him. So, we were eagerly sitting in rows, big and small. Without any care about differences, we sat next to each other. Then Andrew gave the bread and fish into Jesus hands. Jesus showed it to heaven, prayed in silence, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples to share. We boys were watching to see that Jesus was going to eat our food, but instead he broke up the bread and gave it to the disciples. Oh, my goodness, as we were watching Jesus breaking the bread, the pile of bread was just growing more and more before our eyes. The more bread he broke the more it multiplied, and the same thing happened with the fish as it also multiplied.

Now the disciples became lowly servants, and they shared the bread and fish with everyone. People were sitting in the lines all eating happily. Mmmm, I had little less than my friends, I think they had nine or ten handfuls, and the more we ate the more they gave us. Some people started to pack some away to take home. I packed some for my parents because it was so tasty. Most of the people don't know from where the food came, but I knew. I was so proud that Jesus had used my poor family style food to feed this huge crowd.

After the meal, people were asking to leave because they knew Jesus was moving on to the next place. But the disciples began collecting the leftover food which was scattered everywhere. It is common in our culture - we always get more to eat, and most of the time we don't finish it all. So, we boys decided to help the poor disciples as they collected the leftovers. In the end they gathered around twelve baskets of food. You know how we country people always carry baskets in our hands, sometimes we carry food on the way. It is because we will not get everything in our villages so wherever we find things to eat along the way we will buy or gather it in the baskets. Rich people take their donkeys with them to carry their baskets. The Religious people always carry their own food in these baskets because they would never eat anything unclean.

We were so amazed that Jesus even cared for the leftovers, making sure the disciples had collected up everything. Nothing was to be wasted.

We know -

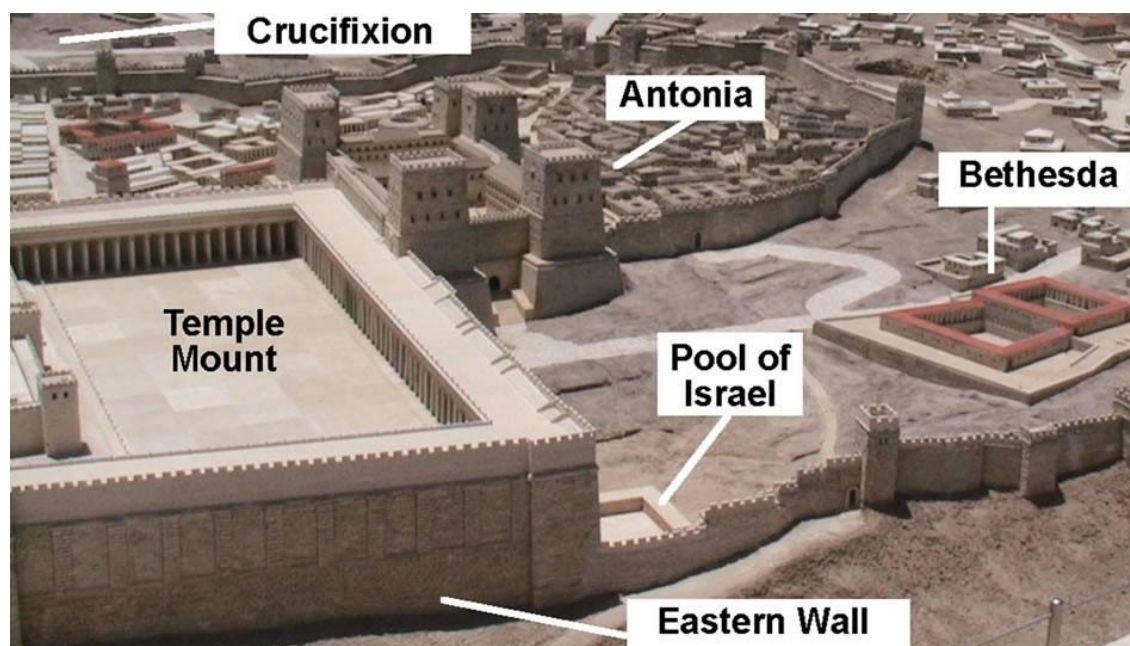
- It is the heart of Jesus to care for the physical needs of the people.
- Others may hold back their food for themselves, but we saw the generosity of this little boy to share what he had.
- Andrew's role was to bring this lad to Jesus, without any hesitation and giving the food, poor as it was, into the hands of Jesus.
- Andrew was the catalyst for enabling the miracle to happen – he brought the boy forward to Jesus.
- No one ever knows what will come out of it when we bring someone to Jesus.
- We do not have to know how our faith works to make such things happen.

- When we are in the hands of Jesus, even if he breaks us, it is to multiply and become a blessing for many, the more he breaks - the more it was multiplied.
- Little is always much in the hands of God.
- Nothing goes to waste in the kingdom of God.

Questions

- 1) “The poor always give the most or they are the first to share” - please comment in your group.
- 2) When Jesus provided food, the people twisted it immediately and tried to make turn him into a King, is there a time when we twist God’s work among us?
- 3) There is no mention of the last supper in John’s Gospel. Can we take this as a last supper? In what ways is it similar or different?
- 4) Jesus did this miracle by using what they had in their hands, do you think is it possible to do this in our times? What changes could we bring about?

Lenten Study Four The Pool Speaks



Read through John 5 1 – 14, stopping to take note of words and phrases that speak to you. The Healing at the Pool

5 Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda^[a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. ^[4] ^[b] ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” ⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the

law forbids you to carry your mat.” ¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ” ¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” ¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The Pool Speaks

I am the pool in Jerusalem, and you will find me near the sheep’s gate. People call me “Bethzatha”, which means “house of olives” and some call me “Bethesda” which means “house of mercy.” I am surrounded by five porticoes. People who have various sicknesses will stay near me. Sometimes the Angel of the Lord will appear and stir the water.



“Whoever enters first will be healed.”

This is the belief of the people. So, I am always surrounded by sick people. People enter through the sheep’s gate, whenever they visit the temple. Here they can find some charity and food given to them.

I do have some long-time clients too. I could introduce you to one particular man who is paralyzed. He has been living here for 38 years. I feel sorry for him because he has been left alone here, no one to help him anymore. He has been lying down and simply waiting for the Angel of the Lord to come and visit him. But I cannot blame them for their beliefs, they are just people of their time, believing those things that have been told to them.

But today we heard that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. He may take this gate, right beside me to enter in. Oh, this Jesus, I have heard he is the most powerful man from God. We all believe that he gave orders to people and if they tried to obey, they would get better. Even the demons are listening to him and fleeing at his word. As he entered, he walked around, and my friend, the one I was telling you about, the paralyzed man, was pointed out to Jesus as a most needy and pitiable case. Everyone knows how it is with this man's sickness. He is too slow to arrive first at the pool because of his hindered movements with the paralyzed limbs. He had no one to help him to be the first one in. Oh, he smells bad because of his condition. People dare not go near him because of the smell. However, Jesus, this friend of the friendless, went close to him and he became the helper of this man who had no earthly helpers.

We all expected that he would preach to this man on the useless superstition of waiting for the water to be stirred. He knew of this man's desire as he had waited 38 years near the pool just to be healed. We all knew of that time that Jesus gave his commands to people and in turn as they tried to obey, the divine power came upon them.

So Jesus asked this man, "do you want to be healed?" Now, fancy that, we all thought this was a very funny question to ask. After all, this man had waited all these years to be healed. Still Jesus asked the question. Deep down he was really asking of him, do you really want to be changed? This man had been there for 38 years, and he just

may have lost hope, he may have become resigned to spending his time just as he was. After all, he does not need to work, and there is no need to look after him. It would be a big burden to making a living. He would need to find work and adjust to a new place, a new way of living. Perhaps all his friends have moved on, migrated from this place. Those people who knew him may be fewer now, there would be few friends or family to surround him with, unlike the hustle and bustle of the busy poolside. If he is healed, there will be major changes to his life, a new life to be found. Jesus was asking him, “Was he ready for this new life?”

But this man’s response was immediate. He wanted to be healed. However, he did not understand how this could happen, after 38 years why should someone come along now to help? On understanding this dilemma, Jesus went up close to this man and told him to get up. Just like that. He walked up really close and said, “Rise, stand up, take your mat and walk.” We were stunned but more so as we watched the man as he listened to Jesus and did exactly what he had told him. Suddenly before us, there is a complete man, standing upright and healed but best of all, he was now filled with joy.



everything behind.

We were all abuzz, talking to each other, and asking why Jesus had asked him to take his mat. When people receive healing, they leave their old stuff for others to use. They jump with joy and leave

But why had Jesus asked this man not to leave his bed there. The bed which he took with him is rough, it is a symbol of all that is his

suffering, his powerless nature and a reminder of the pain and suffering. Jesus was telling them all, that no one should be like this anymore. No one should not have a bed of suffering. He wants him to clear the place completely.

- Miracles happen when our will and God's power co-operate to make it possible.
- Jesus was commanding this man to attempt what felt like the impossible, but when he tried, he was filled with God's power.
- This story began in pain, changed into a miracle story but ends as one that raked up conflict because the healing happened on the Sabbath day.
- The Jews looking on were not concerned about this man who had been healed and his new life. They were only focused on the rules that meant a violation of the Sabbath had occurred. Their focus was on the wrong place.
- God continues to work on the Sabbath giving and sustaining life, so Jesus did the same.

Questions

- 1) What is our hope in life?
- 2) If God is asking us to take up our mat and walk, what will he be asking us?(This is different for each person)
- 3) How much risk do we have to take in life to move on?
- 4) The Jews could not appreciate the healed man but rather they sought to criticize because of Sabbath; in what ways we do forget God's work and bury it under our traditions?

5) To whom and what do we give importance - traditions, and rituals or to people?

6) In what way is tradition stopping us and we are not willing to accept what God is doing?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO1G-o7Yj-c>

Listen to this song –

Beauty for brokenness
Hope for despair
Lord, in your suffering
This is our prayer
Bread for the children
Justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset
Your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives
Cures for their ills
Work for the craftsman
Trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed
Rights for the weak
Voices to plead the cause
Of those who can't speak

God of the poor
Friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts
Let tears fall like rain
Come, change our love
From a spark to a flame

Refuge from cruel wars
Havens from fear
Cities for sanctuary
Freedoms to share
Peace to the killing-fields
Scorched earth to green
Christ for the bitterness
His cross for the pain

Rest for the ravaged earth
Oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned
Our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness
Carelessness, greed
Make us content with
The things that we need

Lighten our darkness
Breathe on this flame
Until your justice
Burns brightly again
Until the nations
Learn of your ways
Seek your salvation
And bring you their praise

Graham Kendrick
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Lenten Study Five The Blind man speaks.



Read John 9: 1 – 41

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “Wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So, the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he

himself insisted, "I am the man."¹⁰ "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.¹¹ He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and then I could see."¹² "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So, they were divided. ¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do

you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"
²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's
disciple! We are disciples of Moses!"²⁹ We know that God spoke to
Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes
from."³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't
know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes."³¹ We know that
God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who
does his will.³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man
born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."
³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you
lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him,
he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the
man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."³⁷ Jesus said, "You
have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."³⁸ Then
the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus
said,^[a] "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind
will see and those who see will become blind."⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who
were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind
too?"⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin;
but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."



The Blind Man speaks.

I am a blind man; my only work is to be begging. I beg to live. One day I overheard a group of people passing by. As they went by, I heard them discussing who was the reason for me to be born blind. Was it my parents' sins or mine? When I heard this, I was mighty upset. Just how could this be? Could I be born blind because of my own sin? After all, how could I sin while I was in my mother's womb? Why does this affect me, because of my parents' sins? But I was blind from birth, therefore any sin I committed would need to have been committed before I was born.

The notion that the parents' sins are visited on their children was common in Jewish beliefs. It was seen as a valid cause of suffering. This line of reasoning was well known in the first century Judaism.

When people were asking about me, I heard the leader of the group, the one with the bold voice who spoke with such authority, speak out. He told the group that this man's blindness is not an occasion to be reflecting on the sin and its causality, but rather it was an occasion to reveal God's glory. He said, "God's works are to be made manifest." I didn't understand him.

I did not ask him for any help, because I didn't know him. I didn't request him to heal me nor to speak to him. But despite all of this, he called me and put mud on my eyes and asked me to wash in the pool of Siloam. This seemed ridiculous. I am a blind man; how can I reach this place on my own? Who asked him to heal me? He knows that I am born blind, I have never seen light or set eyes on humans. I can smell roses, but I have never seen them. But here he is, asking to me to go to Siloam. I knew that spittle was used to heal some sicknesses, at least that is what some would believe. Even my grandma used spittle for boils in the body. But this man had made mud out of spittle and then pasted it on my eyes and asked me to go and wash.

This man had taken methods and customs of my time and was using them. Maybe he is a wise physician? But it is strange that he has requested that I go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Siloam is one of the famous landmarks of this city of Jerusalem. But despite my doubts, I felt compelled to go and wash. This physician is making me work for my healing. As a blind person, I always need others to help me. I asked many people to help me find the way to Siloam, a very arduous task for me. People look at me, a blind beggar, and they turn away, they don't treat me the same as others. Some are quite rude whilst there are some who are helpful. It was quite a journey for me, but in the end, I made it with the help of some along the way. The moment I arrived at the pool I scooped up the water to wash away the mud from my eyes, and at that moment my life was different. I could see everything. For the first time in my entire life, I can see the world around me, the entire world. What I had imagined compared

to what I could see was so different. I could see it all - people, birds, buildings around me, plants, trees, and all kinds of animals. As that man had said I would, I received my vision. I am looking anew at everything around me, no longer driven just by sounds but by the sight of it all in front of me.

But my joy is short lived. Soon I became the subject of some intense interrogation. I don't understand this world now. People were looking at me, but they did not recognise me. Some did and they were asking, is he the beggar? They were saying, you look like that beggar. But no one had the patience to listen to me to hear my story. Someone asked how I was healed, I told them about that one man came and made mud and asked me to wash in the pool of water, and as I did, I received my sight. No matter what I said, they didn't believe me. Instead, they took me to the religious group. The Pharisees asked me to name the healer, but because I do not know his man, I said, one man. The interrogations continued. The Pharisees were angry because this man had healed me on Sabbath day. They still tried to question me, then they called my parents and questioned them. My parents did not care about me because I had been begging. They just replied, "He is old enough, so ask him."

Step by step the Pharisees tried to trip me up, to try to make me to understand that this man is not from God. But the more they insisted, the more my courage grew stronger to defend this man, the one who healed me. First, I referred to him as a man, then as a healer, then a prophet and then I said he was from God. I said that this person who had healed me was from God because no one had ever been like this. When they heard this, they expelled me from their presence. They were very angry with me.

But the man who healed me came and we had a second encounter. At this next encounter, he made me realise, that he is indeed from God, he is the Messiah. Jesus healed my physical vision but greater than this, he also healed my spiritual blindness. At this moment, I

was sad for the Pharisees. They may have been able to see, but I knew they were spiritually blind.

In this encounter we learn -

- The struggle between darkness and light, between blindness and sight is the thread that runs through this story.
- How does Jesus identify himself as the Light of the world?
- The man who is gradually brought from physical blindness to sight also progressively moves from spiritual blindness to religious insight
- Even though he was physically blind, Jesus did not see him as a blind person, he saw him as an ordinary person and that is why he asked to him to wash at Siloam.
- The one who was blind sees, and those who can see are blind
- Humans see and judge by appearance, but God investigates the hearts to see our spiritual sight.
- God's ways are not our ways, God always manages to turn things upside down.

Questions –

1) In what way did God do something different in your personal journey to that which you had wanted or would have done. What was the outcome? Spend two minutes with your group to briefly share if you are interested.

2) By what criteria do we judge others?

3) Do we sometimes blame people for their disability or sickness?

4) In what area of our community of Faith (the church) are we blind? What don't we want to see? What do we judge by the standards of the world, not by God's standards?

5) Does our community of faith look beyond external appearances and perceive the inner truth of people?

Listen to this song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbe7OruLk8I>

Amazing Grace (my chains are gone) by Chris Tomlin

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

Chorus: My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

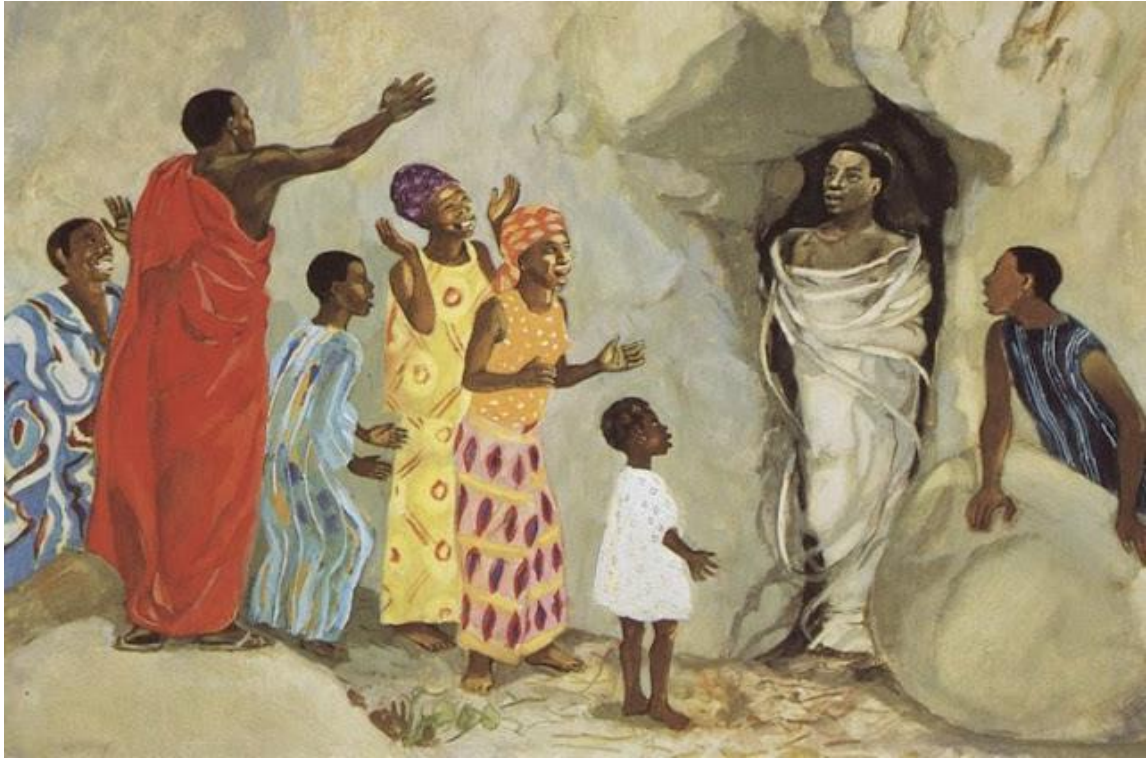
The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

Chorus My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, who called me here below
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine
You are forever mine

Lenten Study Six Martha Speaks



Read through and spend time to find those words or phrases that speak to you, that you hadn't noticed before. Underline them.

John Chapter 11 : 1 – 44 The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are

going back?"⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light.¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem,¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got

up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Martha speaks-

I am Martha, sister to Mary and Lazarus. We live in Bethany, which is on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Lazarus is a shortened form of Eleazar, which means, "God helps". Jesus is our best friend. When he comes with his disciples to Jerusalem, he always comes to visit us on his way. Now my brother is terribly sick, we have sent message to Jesus, begging with him to come, and even saying "He whom you love is ill." We know of Jesus's healing powers, and we have seen him heal others and so we expect him to come to this, his beloved friend. We know Jesus came from God. So, when he hears that my brother is ill, we expect that he will rush from wherever he is and come to us. But it has been five days, and still we have not had a visit. And now it is too late. Today after being in such terrible pain, my brother passed away without ever seeing Jesus visit him in his final days. My family, my friends, our relatives, and all those in the village who knew Lazarus are just consumed by our grief. We have moved Lazarus's body to be kept in the cave as per our tradition. But why, why has Jesus did not come here at all? We thought about the dangers for him in Jerusalem, after all we know that the religious Jews are intent on making trouble for him. Perhaps that is the reason that Jesus did not come here.

Now it is a very busy time for us as we mourn. There are many visitors and relatives who come to visit as they too are mourning with us. We have great support from the community for this time of grieving. We are comforted by the Jewish beliefs. For the three days following the death, the spirit of the person was still hovering around. When the fourth day arrived, we knew that it would be on this day when it was time for the spirit of the dead person to go off to be with God. So, on this third day we went to the cave where the body was residing. We kept some stones on the top to signify when we had come to see him. It is especially hard for us all, because he is the only one man in our family. As you can imagine, our grief is very

intense, so even on the fourth day, we were having people from the villages coming to comfort us.

On the fourth day, I heard news that Jesus was coming to Bethany. I went to meet him on his way. I left without telling my sister or any of the others. When I reached Jesus, I was both angry and upset because he had not been there with us when we needed him. So, I spoke to him and said, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would have not died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you



ask of him.” This time I mentioned him as my brother, because before Lazarus’s death, we had thought that Jesus loved my brother very much. But the reality was that he did not come to see him on his death bed. Perhaps he did not love him as I had thought?

But then Jesus told me that my brother will rise again. As I know the Pharisee view, I responded immediate, and said to him, “Yes, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” When Jesus heard my response, he said, ““I am the resurrection and the life”do you believe this?”. I highlighted the three things in my faith in which I believed about Jesus. “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, you are the son of God, you are the one coming into the world.” After that I left him there and returned to my sister.

We wanted to have a moment with the Lord, just the three of us. But when I quietly told Mary that Jesus was here, she ran off to find him.

But the people who had gathered in the house thought she was going to the tomb to mourn and so they followed her. Mary said the same thing just as I had told Jesus and she cried. She also mentioned our brother. She cried, I cried and everyone who came with her also cried. We were all very upset. When Jesus saw our grief, he too was overcome, and he wept. Those people who were gathered around us, saw this and realised just how much Jesus had loved Lazarus too. We know that men will not show their emotions publicly and especially not in the presence of women. Everyone was talking about what had happened. They asked themselves, why couldn't this man who performs miracles, have saved one he loved so much.

Then Jesus asked us where the body was kept. We took him along to see the place. Quite strangely, Jesus asked us to remove the stone. I had to warn him that there would be an awful stench since the body had been in the tomb for four days already. But Jesus said very kindly to us, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?". When they took the stone away, Jesus quietly said a thanksgiving prayer. He did not ask anything particularly of himself or for anyone. After the prayer, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out". Suddenly the body of my brother stood up on his feet. Jesus called us to unbind him from the cloth bandages and let him go free. I could not believe this - before my very own eyes I can now see that my brother is indeed alive. Initially we were in shock and so we didn't touch him. It took us some time to realise that God has the power to raise even the dead. Alleluia!

- When everyone thought Lazarus was dead, only Jesus believed that he could still live.
- Both the sisters wanted their brother to be healed at the time when he was sick, they did not have any idea that Jesus was going bring his life back.

- Martha believed that Jesus is son of God, the Messiah and the one who is to come, but she did not realize that Jesus could accomplish the impossible.
- Jesus prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, for he knows God always hears him.
- His prayer is really a public testimony to his relationship with God, and the prayer is for the sake of those around him.
- Jesus is not merely a “miracle worker’ as some considered him to be but Jesus has the power of resurrection and he is also the source of eternal life.
- God does not leave us to languish in our various deaths, instead God offers us new life out of the tomb of darkness.

Questions to discuss and consider.

- 1) In our personal experience do you have any time when you felt you were in that dark place, the tomb and you didn’t know how you would get out, but God has rescued you from that time?

- 2) What do you think of God’s willingness to give us mercy, to offer us a chance to start again, time and time again, despite our unrighteousness?

3) Is God asking you for another chance, another opportunity to change yourself, and show his mercy? What will you change? (please don't change the church)

4) If you were given another chance to throw off the burdens of resentment and forgive those who offended you, would you take it? Why or why not? What holds you back?

5) Do you think there is a way we can be released from our preoccupation with ourselves and be attentive to the needs of others?

Listen to this hymn by Charles Wesley - O for a Thousand Tongues

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O9kw3cILpg>

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of our God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
such music in the sinner's ears
is life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive,
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, you deaf; his praise, you dumb,
your loosened tongues employ;
you blind, behold your Saviour come;
and leap, you lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.

TIS 210 Charles Wesley 1707-88 *alt.*