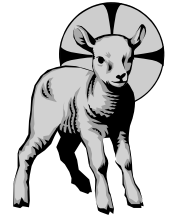




Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)

Summer 2017



Programme for the Sunday Sermon Series

May 14	John 2: 1-11	Abundance
May 21	John 3: 1-21	Life
May 28	John 4: 1-26	Refreshment
June 4	Invitation Service: Peace of Mind	
June 11	John 6: 25-40	Satisfaction (6: 1-15 at Family Service?)
June 18	John 8: 12-30	Light
June 25	John 10: 1-11	Care
July 2	Invitation service: Contentment	
July 9	John 14: 1-7	Hope
July 16	John 15: 1-8(-17)	Fruitfulness

Introduction to the Series

The title of this series 'Life in all its Fullness' comes from Jesus' words in John 10:10 – "I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness" (GNB translation).

In John 3:16 Jesus says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

In John 17:3 Jesus says to his disciples in the upper room on the night before his crucifixion: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

In John 20:30-31 John sums up how he chose what to include in his Gospel in this way: *Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

So this series takes passages from John's Gospel that focus on what Jesus showed and taught about knowing and 'Enjoying God', which brings 'Life in All its Fullness'.

As we look at these passages in our growth groups – as preparation for the following Sunday, or to think together about the message of the previous Sunday – it may be helpful to ask ourselves these questions:

- How could the things that Jesus shows us, or teaches us, in this passage help us to develop our relationship with him and his Father, and to enjoy more of 'life in all its fullness'?
- What does Jesus offer that meets the needs of people today, both those needs that are felt and acknowledged, and those needs that are hidden and not realized.
- How can we show that Jesus can meet those needs by the way that we live our lives on our 'frontlines'? When might we have the opportunity to explain the difference that God can make in these areas, and how he offers us 'life in all its fullness'? (**N.B. Invitation Services above**)

I realize that there is a danger that we can give the impression that God only exists to meet our needs, when in fact God has every right to expect us to acknowledge his Lordship over every aspect of our lives – but, as we shall see in some of these passages from John's Gospel, Jesus himself was often happy to make contact with people on the basis of what he could do to meet their most pressing needs, whatever they were; then he would point them to the even deeper work that God wanted to do in their lives.

Introduction to John's Gospel

Who wrote the Fourth Gospel - does it matter?

Questions about **who** wrote various books of the Bible, and **when** and **where** they wrote them, may seem to be unimportant, unless you are interested in those sort of details, or are a lecturer in religious studies. After all, what matters, surely, is the **message** of the Bible and the **impact** that it can have on our lives here and now – but it isn't as simple as that. The **authority** of the message depends on its origin.

The Christian churches finally agreed by the end of the 4th century AD on the 27 books that make up the **New Testament**. One of the key criteria for recognizing the authority of a book, in order to accept it as part of the New Testament, was whether it was written by one of the **apostles**, those chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses (the Twelve, Paul and Jesus's brother, James) – or the book might be closely linked to an apostle (e.g. Mark, drawing on Peter's preaching; or Luke, linked to Paul). We may well feel that the early Christian churches were in a better position to make decisions about these questions than modern scholars writing over 1,500 years later – and Christian writers in the 2nd to 4th centuries are practically unanimous that the apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel.

Who wrote the Fourth Gospel - what did the early Christians say?

Irenaeus (c.130-200AD, who was taught by Polycarp c.80-165AD, who as a youth was taught by John himself) wrote in about 180AD: *'John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on his breast, published the Gospel while he was resident at Ephesus in Asia.'*

Clement of Alexandria (died 214AD) wrote: *'John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.'* So, he was aware of the difference in emphasis between John and the other gospels.

Who wrote the Fourth Gospel - what do modern(ish) scholars say?

From the 19th century onwards scholars have applied the same historical methods to the Bible as to other ancient documents. In many ways Christian theologians have been *more sceptical* than secular historians. For example, classical scholars would be delighted to have such good **early manuscript evidence** for classical texts (whose reliability, however, is *not* doubted) as we have for John's Gospel: fragments of John 18 dated to **130 AD**, and two copies of most of John from the end of the 2nd century.

Some scholars worked on the assumption that miracles could not happen and so constructed theories that it was only later on that Christians developed these beliefs, including the belief that Jesus was the Son of God, rather than a Jewish healer and prophet.

Modern scholars disagree with each other - about everything(!) - including when the gospels were written, by whom, and how accurately they reflect what Jesus actually did and taught. It is important to realize that **the scholars' conclusions are influenced by their initial assumptions as much as by the historical and manuscript evidence** - and I accept that this also applies to 'conservative' scholars, whether evangelical or Roman Catholic, and to my own conclusions as well.

Who wrote the Fourth Gospel - what can we work out from the Gospel itself?

- written by an eyewitness of the events: e.g. *John 19:34-35; 21:24-25*
- depending on the Holy Spirit for the accuracy of his message: *John 14: 23-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15.*
- the *'beloved disciple'/'the disciple whom Jesus loved'*. This is one of the Twelve; if we eliminate the disciples who *are* named, it is almost certainly John, who might have been reluctant to draw attention to himself by name. *Anyone else* writing the Gospel would be more likely to have called John by name.
See John 13:22-23; 19:25-27; 20:1-2; 21:7; 21:20.

Where and When was John's Gospel written?

- Probably about 80AD, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 AD), at a time of some persecution of Christians, both by Roman authorities and Jewish communities.
- According to early Christian writers, John lived to a very old age, possibly into his nineties, c.100AD.
- from Ephesus according to Irenaeus. John taught a lot in the churches of Asia (Turkey); he wrote them the three letters of John and probably also Revelation (as long as it is the same John in *Rev 1:1,4*).
- The Gospel is probably aimed at well-educated Greek-speaking Jews, or synagogue-attending Gentiles, because John assumes his readers know the Old Testament.