**Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church**

**Adult Faith Formation**

**John – The Light Gospel**

**Sunday, September 4, 2022**

**Bill Hull**

**“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”**

(Psalm 119:105)

**Opening Prayer**

**Style, date, authorship:** It is customary to categorize John as distinctive, thus the term “Synoptic Gospels” to categorize Matthew, Mark, and Luke as different from John. This is helpful up to a point. However, there is a tendency to over emphasize the difference between John’s account and the other three gospels. For example, many scholars refer to John as primarily a “spiritual” portrayal, rather than the kind of narratives in the Synoptic Gospels. Hopefully, this study will lead us to a different conclusion.

A helpful statement about the nature of John’s Gospel is this quote from Karoline Lewis’ commentary on John:

“One of the most prevalent assumptions about the Fourth Gospel is that because of its so-called high Christology, it should be dated later than its counterparts, sometimes even into the beginning of the second century. John’s alternative portrait of Jesus is a perspective that needed time to develop. Yet there is no reason to date John any later than, say, Matthew or Luke (if we assume they both had Mark as a source), anywhere between 75 and 90. It is also worthwhile to note the correlate assumption about the Synoptic Gospels in this argument. To argue that John’s Gospel represents a particularly high Christology is equally reductionistic of the Synoptic Gospels. It also raises the question, what do we mean by “high” Christology, and how and why does time determine it? Moreover, the Synoptic Gospels also have their own operative Christologies and should not be relegated to a lower status, whatever that might mean. John’s Christological portrait is not high; it is just different. This commentary will assume this as difference only, not higher development, and will pay attention to the differences” (*John*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries, p. 4, Kindle Edition).

In the text of the gospel of John, the author is not identified. A common assumption is that it the disciple, John the son of Zebedee; but there is no consensus among scholar as to the exact identity of the writer. Here I will insert my favorite way to resolve disputes over the authorship of a book in the Bible: Someone wrote it, and it is in the canon! So, let’s read and learn from it.

Another issue that must be acknowledged and addressed is the tragic use of the gospel of John over the centuries to support antisemitism. This is based on John’s frequent negative references to the “Jews” as opponents of Jesus. Many modern day scholars are challenging the idea that the writer of John intended this meaning. There is growing consensus that it would be more accurate in these references to understand that John is specifically addressing the Jewish religious leaders because of their narrowness of vision and understanding, and not meaning Jews in general. We need to remember that Jesus was Jewish, as were his disciples.

**Content/Outline:** Many scholars see two major sections to John’s Gospel: Chapters 1-12, The Book of Signs, which focuses broadly on the public ministry of Jesus, spanning some three years; and chapters 13-21, The Book of Glory, concentrating more narrowly on the last three days of Jesus’ life on earth.

An overall outline of John, adapted and edited from various sources:

1:1-18 The Prologue/ John the Baptist’s foreshadowing the person and ministry of Jesus

1:19-51 The Calling of the Disciples

2 The Wedding at Cana and the Temple Incident in Jerusalem

3 Discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus

4 The Samaritan Woman at the Well/Healing of Official’s Son

5 Healing of the Man Ill for Thirty-eight Years

6 Feeding of the Five Thousand

7–8 Conflict with the Jewish Authorities in Jerusalem

9 Healing of the Man Blind from Birth

10 Shepherd Discourses

11 The Raising of Lazarus

12 At the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus/Entry into Jerusalem/Discourse on Glory

13 Farewell meal and The Foot Washing

14–16 The Farewell Discourse

17 Jesus’ Prayer for His Disciples

18–19 Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion

20–21 Resurrection Appearances

**Prologue:** There are obvious parallels between the opening of John’s gospel and the first creation story in Genesis. This portion of John begins and foreshadows for us the major themes of John.

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| **Genesis 1 (selected)**  **1**In the beginning when God began to create the  heavens and the earth, **2**the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **3**Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4**And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. **5**God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day....  **14**And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, **15**and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. **16**God made the two great lights — the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night — and the stars. **17**God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, **18**to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19**And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. | **John 1 (selected)**  **1**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was in the beginning with God. **3**All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.  **6**There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7**He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8**He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9**The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world....  **14**And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. |

* What similarities and differences do you perceive in these two narratives?
* What might the writer of John be signaling to readers about the focus and purpose of the book?

**“I am” statements:** A singular feature of John’s gospel are the well-known “I Am” statements:

“Jesus said to them, ‘**I** **am** **the bread of life**. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes **i**n me will never be thirsty.’” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, **‘I am the light of the world**. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’” (8:12, 9:5)

“So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, **I** **am the gate** for the sheep.’” (10:7)

**“I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11, 14)

“Jesus said to her, **‘I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.’” (John 11:25)

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6)

“Believe me that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me**.” (John 14:11, 20)

“**I am the true vine**, and my Father is the vinegrower... **I am the vine**; you are the branches.” (John 15:1, 5)

**Jesus’ discourses with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well:**

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| **John 3:1-10**  “**1**Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2**He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.’ **3**Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’  **4**Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ **5**Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6**What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7**Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ **8**The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’  **9**Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ **10**Jesus answered him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’” | **John 4 (selected)**  **3** (Jesus)“left Judea and started back to Galilee. **4**But he had to go through Samaria. **5**So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6**Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.  **7**A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’ **8**(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9**The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) **10**Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ **11**The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?  **12**Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ **13**Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14**but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ **15**The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water....’  **28**Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,  **29**‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah,  can he?’ **30**They left the city and were on their way to him....  **39**Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’” |

* Compare and contrast these two encounters.
* Which of the events do you most identify with and how?

**References to “Light” in the Gospel of John ((New Revised Standard Version):**

John 1:4 “In him was life, and the life was the **light** of all people.”

John 1:5 “The **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.”

John 1:7 “He came as a witness to testify to the **light**, so that all might believe through him.”

John 1:8 “He himself was not the **light**, but he came to testify to the **light**.”

John 1:9 “The true **light**, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

[John 3:19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A19&version=NRSVUE) “And this is the judgment, that the **light** has come into the world, and people loved darkness

rather than **light** because their deeds were evil.”

John 3:20 “For all who do evil hate the **light** and do not come to the **light**, so that their deeds may not

be exposed.”

John 3:21 “But those who do what is true come to the **light**, so that it may be clearly seen that their

deeds have been done in God.”

John 5:35 “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his **light**.

John 8:12 “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the **light** of life.’”

John 9:5 “As long as I am in the world, I am the **light** of the world.”

John 11:9 “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do

not stumble because they see the **light** of this world’”

John 11:10 “But those who walk at night stumble because the **light** is not in them.”

John 12:35 **“**Jesus said to them, ‘The **light** is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the **light**, so

that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.’”

John 12:36 “While you have the **light**, believe in the **light**, so that you may become children of **light**.”

John 12:46 “I have come as **light** into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not

remain in the darkness.”

* In all of the gospels the full range of human senses are engaged: touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell... In John, the sense of seeing is particularly focused on. Why?
* How is Jesus “light” for you?

**Closing Prayer –** (Based on Matthew 5:13-18)

Lord, you have said that you are the light of the world. And, you have told us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. How can that be? It is more comfortable to see you as light, but ourselves? Also you tell us we are like a city on a hill and cannot be hidden. People see our lives and judge you by our actions and attitudes. That’s worrisome! Troubling though your message is, we do desire to live and act in ways that reflect your light. Empower our lights so that others may see you as a God of grace as well as a God who challenges all of our assumptions. Help us to live so that we and others will give glory to you, eternal God. Amen.

