

Taking a closer look at  
St John's Gospel



Booklet 2



## Welcome

### A short course on John's Gospel for the Tring Team Parish

#### **Background reading before we start.**

In John's account the last supper / foot washing the meal comes to an end with Judas departing. It is a dramatic end, there is a short sentence "it was night" 13.30 Judas embraces the darkness and the remaining disciples stay with the light which has come into the world. What happens next is a block of teaching which has become known as the farewell discourse. In our Bibles this is chapters 14 - 17 of John's Gospel. You might recall that in the opening talk about John's Gospel was that despite having a very coherent structure there are some anomalies in the Gospel. One of them is found in John 14.31 where Jesus proposes that they arise and go on their way, (presumably meaning the meals over lets get up and leave the table) but as we read on we notice that they only actually depart from the upper room at the beginning of chapter 18. Some scholars think therefore that the chapters are in the wrong order. In these farewell discourses there are three sections and a concluding farewell prayer.

**John 14.1-31 First Discourse** Jesus opens the teaching by telling them not to let their hearts be troubled (the heart being the seat of our emotions) as he is leaving them but we quickly move to the main aspect of teaching which is that when he leaves the disciples he will send the Paraclete in his place.

**John 15.1-17 Second Discourse.** Jesus uses the imagery of the vine to teach about his love for the disciples and how he is the source of life for the Christian community.

**John 15.18-16.33 Third Discourse.** Jesus returns to his theme of the Paraclete and emphasises that the spirit will guide us into all truth.

**John 17.1-26 Jesus' farewell prayer.** Jesus prays to the father for the disciples.

None of this material is found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. At the end of the prayer, they move from the upper room to the garden of Gethsemane and we return to more shared material, albeit with significant differences.

## Opening conversations? *(Maybe think about these before you meet)*



- Were you able to come to Martin Banister’s lecture on the farewell discourses? Did anything stand out to you, or was there anything you wanted to find out more about. (Its OK if you didn't come!)
- What sermons have you heard on the Paraclete?

## Reading and listening to God’s Word



**Read John 15.26—16.16** (from your usual Bible). In this translation Paraclete is translated to “friend”. Pause, allow to seep in. Read it again preferably from a different translation (below is the Message)

“When the Friend I plan to send you from the Father comes—the Spirit of Truth issuing from the Father—he will confirm everything about me. You, too, from your side must give your confirming evidence, since you are in this with me from the start.

“I’ve told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead. They are going to throw you out of the meeting places. There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he’s doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father. I’ve told you these things so that when the time comes and they start in on you, you’ll be well-warned and ready for them.

“I didn’t tell you this earlier because I was with you every day. But now I am on my way to the One who sent me. Not one of you has asked, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, the longer I’ve talked, the sadder you’ve become. So let me say it again, this truth: It’s better for you that I leave. If I don’t leave, the Friend won’t come. But if I go, I’ll send him to you.

“When he comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.

“I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won’t draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. He will honor me; he will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I’ve said, ‘He takes from me and delivers to you.’

“In a day or so you’re not going to see me, but then in another day or so you will see me.”



## Teaching

### Some introductory thoughts

John’s Gospel clearly sets out a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However our first challenge in understanding this concept comes in trying to understand the word which John uses to describe the Spirit. His word is Paraclete. In the New Testament this word is used only in John’s Gospel and the first epistle of John. The Greek word *parakletos* is derived from a verb *parakalein* which can have several meanings: to summon, to comfort to encourage or to console. However it also has the meaning of Counsellor or Advocate. In 1 John 2.1 (which those who come to BCP services will know well) it is this sense of an advocate which is much more clear and the phrase “we have an advocate with the father” sticks with us. For many this becomes the way in which Paraclete is translated. However a variety of different options are found in popular Bible translations, and none is incorrect.

NIV & NRSV	Advocate
The Message	Friend
King James	Comforter
Good News	Helper

Which of these translations do you find most helpful?

Jesus teaches that the Spirit / Paraclete will be the way in which Jesus will continue with his disciples and the church even though he is physically absent from them. The role of the Holy Spirit is to continue the work of Jesus. It is “another paraclete” in the sense that Jesus was our advocate with the father and now the Holy Spirit will take on that role. The paraclete will

- Expose the foolishness of the world
- Recall what the earthly Jesus had taught
- Bear witness to Jesus
- Teach new material which the disciples cant yet cope with
- Will guide them into all truth

You might recall from the introductory talk the Gnosticism places a high value on hidden truth. The difference here is that the truth is not secret, instead the spirit makes open that which Jesus has already revealed. The fundamental job of the Spirit is to remind us of the teaching of Jesus. John presents the Spirit / Paraclete as the successor to Jesus who carries on the work of revealing who God is, and who sustains the disciples. Unlike the earthly Jesus the paraclete will be with us forever.

What do you think is the role of the Holy Spirit?

### **The Holy Spirit and the early church**

John is clearly writing to a community which experiences the Spirit within their life and worship. It is interesting to note that the spirit is present in the synoptic Gospels but in a much more limited way. The Spirit is present at the baptism of Jesus, or Mark talks of the spirit enabling the disciples (Mark 13.11) but otherwise teaching on the Holy Spirit in the Gospels is left to John.

Where the Holy Spirit becomes much more explicit is in the Acts of the Apostles and the day of Pentecost, and the gifts of the Spirit which we find in Paul's writings. It is only in John that the Spirit is described as the Spirit of truth.

### **What is truth?**

Pilate is going to ask this question of Jesus a little later. You will recall that in the prologue we heard the incarnate word was full of grace and truth and also in the section Jesus tells us he is truth. Or more importantly he is the only truth.

#### **No one comes to the father except through me.**

I am a bad Christian, or at least I am a bad priest. You might have heard me say previously that my faith is not centred on the person of Christ. For me the existence of God is absolute. Whether God is experienced through a nagging conscience or God is experienced in awe and wonder at the beauty found in nature, for me, God is.

Having been brought up in western Christendom, and born into a Christian family, I have been told the story of Jesus. This colours in God. Having studied theology at university I add to that colour a reasonably rigorous framework which not only adds colour but also intellectual credibility to the concept of God. The Jesus story works for me, and I can defend it. But when push comes to shove I don't believe in God because of my experience of Jesus, instead I am prepared to accept Jesus because of my experience of God.

I suspect I always have a nagging doubt at the back of my mind: had I been born in Mumbai would I have been Christian or Hindu, and if I had been born in Karachi would I have been Muslim. Can one only come to the Father through Christ or are there many paths to the Godhead?

Is John making an absolutist claim or is he emphasising that it is the way of life which is to be led which leads to God? Personally, I find the concept of the Spirit of Truth who will lead us into all truth broad

enough to acknowledge that various religions have competing truth claims, but, if we remain open to what God is saying to us, if we recognise our limited comprehension the “way” can lead us towards “truth”. We should however always be wary of claiming to be the sole arbiters of that truth.

How do you square Christianity with the competing truth claims of other religions. Are we right and they wrong?

***‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth’ (v.13)***

Truth is the one virtue with which Jesus identified himself (John 14.6). He knew how crucially important it is to be fiercely loyal to the truth, and yet that’s precisely the virtue most at risk in our ‘make-it-up-as-you-go-along’ political and social culture. If truth is simply what I want it to be, then we’re lost. This problem isn’t new. Winston Churchill said: ‘Men (sic) occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.’

Jesus knew the corkscrew nature of the human heart, always bending the truth to our own interests, so he emphasized that the coming Spirit would be a spirit of truth, a plumbline to rely on, speaking only what was to be heard in the heavenly realm. We are therefore on safe ground when we say, with philosopher Simone Weil, that Christ would want us to prefer truth to Christ, because before being Christ, he is truth. I have always thought that if we aim first for the truth, we’ll soon come across Jesus.

I once saw a poster that said: ‘That which can be destroyed by the truth, should be.’ Perhaps our personal poster could be: ‘Hold fast to Jesus, and live the truth.’

*Reflection by John Pritchard retired as Bishop of Oxford in 2014. Prior to that he was Bishop of Jarrow, Archdeacon of Canterbury and Warden of Cranmer Hall, Durham.*



# WORSHIP

O God, make speed to save us.  
**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give  
ear to my cry;  
**Hold not your peace at my tears**

*Psalm 39.13*

We adore you, O Christ,  
and we bless you,  
because by your holy cross  
you have redeemed the world.  
**Holy God, holy and strong,  
holy and immortal,  
have mercy upon us.**

We glory in your cross, O Lord,  
and praise and glorify your holy  
resurrection:  
for by virtue of the cross  
joy has come to the whole world.  
*from the Liturgy of Good Friday*

## Bible Reading

*Either a little bit from today's  
session or another reading*

## Song

Come, gracious Spirit,  
heavenly Dove, with light and  
comfort from above;  
be thou our guardian,  
thou our guide, o'er every thought  
and step preside.

The light of truth to us display,  
and make us know and chose  
thy way;  
plant holy fear in every heart,  
that we from God may ne'er depart.

Lead us to Christ, the living Way,  
nor let us from his pastures stray;  
lead us to holiness, the road  
that we must take to dwell with  
God.

Lead us to heaven, that we may  
share  
fullness of joy for ever there  
lead us to God, our final rest,  
to be with him for ever blest.

## Intercessions & Collect

Holy God, our lives are laid open  
before you: rescue us from the  
chaos of sin and, through the death  
of your Son, bring us healing and  
make us whole in Jesus Christ our  
Lord. **Amen**

May God bless us and show us  
compassion and mercy. **Amen.**

**Watch  
+ Pray**