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John 14:6-11
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Not Your Average Matthew, Mark or Luke!

Well, for those of you who were here last Sunday, I almost feel like I have to apologize.

You see, Dave Robertson was our “guest preacher” last Sunday. Now, I am not apologizing for Dave’s sermon ...

Dave hit a monster home run. His sermon was deep, profound, spiritual, and touched many of you.

But, my series this Lent, on how the different gospel writers viewed Jesus, has been more academic. Interesting, I hope, but not so emotionally engaging.

So, even though they say (whoever they are) you are never supposed to apologize, and I won’t – it is back to the more unemotional, but “interesting” realm.

This week we are focusing on the last of the four gospels, the Gospel of John.

If you or I were telling the story of Jesus today, we would inevitably bring out things about Jesus that are particularly important to us, or that we see as particularly important for people today to hear.

The evangelists were the same. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have all told the story of Jesus in different ways, because all had their own agenda in writing their accounts.

None of the four are what we would call biographies of Jesus (in the sense of covering all of his life from birth to death), but rather are selective and interpretive accounts of his person and ministry.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic (meaning presenting the same view) gospels, because they have much that is similar, although each has a different slant.

Matthew, one of the twelve, wrote primarily to Jews, emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the King of Israel.

Mark, the shortest gospel, probably wrote from Rome under Peter's influence. He emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man who came to serve and give His life a ransom for many (10:45).

Luke (the longest book in the New Testament by volume) was written by a physician and a co-worker with the apostle Paul, who also wrote the Book of Acts. His gospel is aimed at Gentiles and emphasizes Jesus Christ's humanity.

But the Gospel of John is different.

If you have read John's Gospel you will know that we are not in the Synoptic Gospels anymore!

While the synoptics borrow from one another and contain many of the same stories about Jesus, the Gospel of John contains between 80-90% material that is only found in John.

Most scholars think that he wrote his gospel sometime in the 80's or early 90's A.D., and so he most likely knew about the other gospels and did not feel the need to duplicate what they had written.

Remember, Mark was written around 55 CE and Matthew and Luke between 65 and 75 CE.

From the very beginning of John's Gospel, we realize that we are in for something different.

John starts his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word (in other words, JESUS), and the Word (JESUS) was with God, and the Word (JESUS) was God."

John puts it right out there. Jesus is the Word and Jesus is God!

John quite specifically tells what his agenda is in chapter 20, verse 31, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

Scholars will say that this may well have been the original ending of the gospel, with chapter 21 (the current final chapter) being a sort of appendix.

Whether or not it is, it sums up John's gospel brilliantly. Chapter after chapter, story after story, can be seen as trying to help us believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that there is life in him.

The Gospel of John was most likely written by a Christian named John.

However, most scholars believe that the contents of the book indicate quite clearly that the author was not the John who was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, for it contains no direct personal references of the type that one would expect from an intimate associate of Jesus.

On the contrary, it presents an interpretation of Jesus that reflects ideas and situations that prevailed in the Christian community toward the end of the first century.

Interesting, and I didn't know this until I did my research for this sermon, most progressive biblical scholars actually think that there were multiple writers.

They believe this because there are all kinds of awkward transitions and weird edits within the story.

I won't bore you with all their evidence, just know that the Gospel of John apparently went through more than one revision before it arrived at its final form.

As you read the Gospel, you will soon realize that John is not trying to persuade you to believe in some general notions about Jesus, such as, he was a good man, a great teacher, or even a prophet of God.

John wants you to believe specifically that Jesus is the Christ—the Jewish Messiah (Anointed One)—who was prophesied of in the Old Testament.

And he wants you to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, which means, he is God.

Got it? Good!

From the very outset till the very end, one is called to believe. No other gospel accentuates belief like John's.

As a matter-of-fact, the Greek verb used for belief, *pisteus*, is found 98 times in his gospel, more than all the other gospels combined.

This points to the fact that faith/belief is an action (just as a verb is), and John uses it to reiterate to his readers that belief should not remain stagnant.

It is alive and dynamic, bearing fruit and abiding in Christ (15:1-11).

If you think about it, that should have meaning to us. Our faith is not to be passive. To have faith, to have belief, is to be active. It is not enough to say we want to help the poor, we need to do something about it.

That's what our Mission Fair today is all about! It is about putting our Faith in to Action. Faith in Action. Clever, huh!

One of the questions scholars ask themselves is why the Gospel of John is so different from the other Gospels.

Now, I need to point out that the Gospel of John and Synoptic Gospels do share a common framework.

Both are about Jesus and his disciples, Jesus teaches and heals in both, and in both he is put to death and is resurrected.

There are even some stories that are found in both John and the synoptics (turning over the money changing tables in the temple, walking on water, feeding the 5,000, the trial before Pilate, among others).

But it ends there Remember over 80% of John is unique to John.

This difference was apparently so obvious that several early church leaders even argued against including John in the bible.

John begins in eternity, identifying Jesus as God and Creator (1:1-3). But then he omits many important things that the other gospels contain.

There is no mention of Jesus' birth, his baptism, or his temptations in the desert. There is no list of the twelve disciples. There are no stories of Jesus casting out demons and no parables.

John gives us the longest and most detailed account of events in the Upper Room on the night Jesus was betrayed, but he never mentions the Lord's Supper.

He doesn't tell us about Jesus' agony in the garden, although from John we learn that it was Peter who whacked off Malchus' ear.

And, although John records the risen Jesus telling Mary to tell the disciples that he will ascend to the Father (20:17), there is no account of Jesus' ascension.

When compared to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John's Gospel marches to the beat of its own drum.

John is the only gospel that takes place over three years, as opposed to one year. I never realized that. Doesn't say much about the poor or the kingdom of heaven.

John does have Jesus talk about himself nearly non-stop.

Repeatedly refers to Jesus as God's "son." The term is used over 20 times in John's Gospel, but only three times in the other three gospels.

John is also full of symbolic language that makes you stop and think about the deeper meaning of what he is saying. John's Gospel is all about deeper meanings!

Rather than referring to Jesus' "miracles" or "wonders" (terms the other gospel writers use), John calls them "signs".

A sign points to something beyond itself. John wants us to perceive the deeper meaning behind the miracle itself.

As a matter-of-fact, John records only seven miracles (which he calls signs), considerably less than are recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.

And they are signs of the presence of the power of God, designed to bring about a transformation in people's lives.

The seven miracle stories recorded in John include turning water into wine; various healings ; walking on water; feeding of the five thousand; and raising Lazarus from the dead.

Each of these stories is used as an introduction to a message Jesus then gives in relation to the quality of a person's life.

And often they are coupled with one of his "I am" sayings, each deserving of its own sermon, for example (see if you recognize these):

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst."

"I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."

"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me."

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

In each, we are invited to dwell on the significance of what it might mean to know Jesus in that way.

I also find it interesting that in the other three gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—Jesus is just a tiny bit leery about being nailed to a cross to die a slow, painful, and humiliating death.

But not in John's Gospel. Nope, John's Jesus is totally fine with it:

Chapter 12, verse 27: "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."

Bottom line: Jesus is utterly and completely faithful. He aligns himself with God by being 100% in tune with everything God wants him to do.

God wants him to deliver his message to the entire world? Check. God wants him to confront some non-believers holding sharp rocks? Done. God wants him to be nailed to a cross? No problem.

Jesus is like the ultimate yes man. But in this case, it's a good thing—after all, his direct supervisor is the Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

The question to us then is, how faithful are we? In good times? In bad? Maybe especially in bad? John encourages us to follow Jesus' example.

The Gospel of John ends (well, almost ends) appropriately enough with the story of Doubting Thomas, my namesake.

And this story, found only in John, sums up much of what the gospel is about.

Thomas finds it hard to 'believe' in Jesus' resurrection, even though the other disciples have told him that they have seen Jesus.

Thomas wants first-hand, tangible proof, if he is to believe. In some ways, he is a very twenty-first century man!

Then Jesus appears to him, and Thomas has before his own eyes the proof he wants. He even touches Jesus' wounds.

To which Jesus says: "Stop doubting and believe,"

And Thomas responds with the words "My Lord and my God."

This is where John wants all his readers to end up, responding to the "signs" of Jesus, and coming to a faith, not just in Jesus' divinity, but in Jesus as "my" Lord and God.

We might expect John to end the story with Thomas's words of ultimate worship. But he gives the last word to Jesus.

Jesus says: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now, to some, that comment of Jesus might sound like a put-down, an anticlimax after the climax of Thomas's confession.

But, in fact, they are an important promise from the risen Christ to the readers of John's gospel (and us) who will not have the visible, tangible proof that Thomas had, but who will have the witness to Jesus and his signs that John has given them.

Jesus' words are an encouragement to John's readers, who may indeed be having doubts because they live in a doubting environment, and

equally to all of us, who may also have doubts, an encouragement to believe and to go on believing.

The actual end of John's Gospel is where Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. When Peter assures him that he does, Jesus doesn't pat Peter on the back, but tells him to do something ...

"Feed my sheep."

If we indeed love Jesus, we to are asked to demonstrate our faith, our love, our devotion, not with mere words, but with action.

Faith is not faith without action. Love is not love without action.

Following this service, you will have the opportunity to demonstrate that love by participating in our Mission Fair.

It is my hope and prayer that you will all stay and visit the various tables manned by our mission partners ... and then not just visit, but sign up. And then SHOW UP!

You can make a difference!

Amen!