

# **Riverwood-Punchbowl Anglican Church**

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Riverwood**

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## **John 1-12**

### **The Book of Signs**

## Introduction

When you sit down to read a novel or story, we usually consider it a bit of a “no-no” to go to the last chapter and see how the whole thing is going to end, before you’ve read the story itself. That’s probably good advice to apply when reading the books of the Bible, too, if we are reading them for the first time. But if we have read them before ... maybe several times before ... we’re certainly not ruining any surprises by going to the end first. In fact, it’s a way of picking up some clues that may help us in understanding the overall pattern of the story ... what the writer is trying to help us see. And knowing that, we can better understand the individual episodes of the story ... where they fit into the greater picture. It’s a bit like tiles in a mosaic ... each one a creation in its own right, but when you step back and observe the overall pattern you see that a larger picture emerges.

The first verse of John’s gospel says ... “In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God” 1 and verse four “So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father”, while towards the end we read “Jesus’ disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life.” (20:30 & 31) So the emphasis in John, then, is Christ himself, eternal and divine, who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is indeed a lot like a mosaic ... a mosaic whose individual parts fit together to form a picture of Christ.

There have been stories of people who have been converted because an artist’s painting depicting Jesus has had a profound effect on them. Holman Hunt’s “Jesus knocking at the door” is one. “The good shepherd” rescuing his lost sheep is another. But John’s gospel doesn’t show us an image of Jesus that emerges from an artist’s imagination. What we have in John is a picture that comes from God’s inspiration. The intention is that we look at this picture and see someone who is wonderfully greater than any man, someone we could willingly place our trust in and continue to place our trust in.

The focus of these studies is the early part of John’s gospel, from 2:1 to 12:50. This part of the gospel is sometimes called “The Book of Signs”. John is very selective in the miracles he relates ... he majors on seven from Jesus’ ministry. This is far fewer than the other gospels, as John himself admits (20:30 above). In “John”, the miracles of Jesus are often referred to as

“signs”. Like a street sign or a billboard, they are all meant to point beyond themselves to “the real thing”. A billboard might have a very compelling, appetizing picture of a pizza (for example), but it would be pretty silly for someone to try to eat the billboard. It’s great (from the advertiser’s point of view) if the billboard catches your attention. But the intention is that you go beyond that, find the place where you can purchase the real pizza, and eat one of those. Another thing about street signs or billboards, is that they give you some confidence as to whether you’re on the right track or not. Maybe you’re going for a swim, and you see a sign saying “To the Beach”. That gives you a measure of confidence that you are heading the right way. Or maybe you’re just out on a drive, and you see that sign. And you say to yourself “That’d be a good place to go!” So you make that your destination, and you head off down the road.

It’s similar with John’s approach to signs. Sometimes, people are looking for the right way to go in life. The signs tell them “Follow this man,” “Go this way”. Sometimes the issue of direction in life isn’t what people have in mind at all. But they see the sign, recognise that this man is worth following, and go his way. At times though, people choose to ignore the sign, or even, at the extreme, to deface it or point it in a different direction. We see this in John’s gospel with the reaction of the Jews to Jesus’ miracles.

Signs also have a negative function. If I don’t want to go to the beach, or I don’t like pizza (is it possible???), I’ll know not to go the way the sign is pointing me. As Jesus makes it more and more plain who he is, he’s constantly bringing people to a point of decision ... will they go his way or won’t they? Will they **keep going** his way or won’t they? In John’s gospel we see people being faced with this decision. Some decide one thing, some decide another. And of course, the implicit question to us as readers is “What will you decide?”

Are you a Christian of many years’ standing? Are you a fairly new believer? Are you someone who’s enquiring about the Christian faith? Whichever category you belong to, John’s gospel challenges you to look harder at Jesus, to see him more clearly for who he is, and to be sure about where your reliance rests.

**Graeme Orr** 2001

## **Week 1**

### **THEME:What It's All About**

#### **Day 1            Read Genesis 1:1-5, 26-27**

What similarities do you see between the start of John and the start of Genesis? How does God bring creation into being?

#### **Day2            Read John 1:19-28**

What comparisons does John the Baptist make between himself and Jesus?

#### **Day 3            Read John 1:29-34**

In this gospel miracles are called "signs" (see introduction). John the Baptist doesn't do any miracles, but his words have a similar purpose. What is his purpose?

#### **Day 4            Read John 1:35-42**

How many followers did John gain for himself by pointing the way to Jesus? What does this mean for us?

#### **Day 5            Read John 1:43-51**

What effect did Jesus have on Philip and Nathanael when they met him?

*Pray that God will give you a clearer picture of Jesus as we study this gospel.*

## Study Passage: John 1:1-18

**Opening Activity** ... Carry out a brief activity in silence (something where directions usually need to be given ... eg organising a group activity; serving refreshments; announcements ... ?“John In Exile” video?).

1. Your opening activity was carried out without words. What do you think it means at the start of the gospel when Jesus is described as “the Word”? As a suggestion, you might also like to compare with Genesis 1:1; 11:1-9.
2. Peter, in his preaching, described Jesus as “the author of life”. What does this help us see in John’s comments about life in 1:1-4? What reassurance is there for us in this?
3. List the things that the writer says about light. Think of evangelism as holding up a light in a dark and gloomy place. What does this image help us to understand about sharing our faith?
4. What does John the Baptist’s example help us to understand about bearing witness to Jesus?
5. This passage has a number of memorable verses. Choose one and either
  - a) Rewrite it in your own words, or
  - b) Write a brief prayer based on the things the verse says.

## **Week 2**

### **THEME:What's New?**

#### **Day 1            Read John 2:13-25**

In John 3, one of the leading men in Jerusalem comes to Jesus. What things has Jesus done to make the rulers take notice of him?

#### **Day 2            Read John 3:16-21**

John 3:18 suggests that ultimately, there are only two types of people in the world. What are they and how are they different from one another?

#### **Day 3            Read Numbers 21:4-9**

What promise did God make about the serpent Moses was to make? What did the people show when they went to look at the bronze serpent after being bitten?

#### **Day 4            Read John 7:32, 45-52**

Some people hold back from commitment because they have doubts about Jesus. How does the attitude of these Pharisees differ from doubt?

#### **Day 5            Read John 19:38-42**

Taking yesterday's passage into account as well, what has happened to Nicodemus since the interview of John 3?

*Think of someone you know who is "in the dark" spiritually. Pray that they may be born again.*

## Study Passage: John 3:1-15

1. Have you had the experience of misunderstanding someone else's advice/instructions to you? Did it result in your doing something wrong? What happened?

2. Why was it likely that Nicodemus was going to find Jesus difficult to understand? (3:1 compare with 1:17) What question does he ask Jesus?

3. Jesus uses the startling "birth" picture to get Nicodemus to rethink his way of seeing things. What does the "birth" picture convey to you?

4. Unlike the process of physical birth, spiritual birth involves responsibility on the part of the one being born. What is this responsibility? (see 1:12, 13 and 3:14). Why would someone like Nicodemus still find this hard?

5. Would you use the "born again" idea when explaining spiritual matters to others who are "in the dark" like Nicodemus was? Why/Why not?

## **Week 3**

### **THEME: Party Time**

#### **Day 1            Read Matthew 22:1-14**

Why (do you think) the invited guests didn't come to the banquet when they were invited?

#### **Day 2            Read Luke 5:33-39**

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:  
... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance"

*(Ecclesiastes 3:1&4)*

What behaviour is not appropriate at a wedding?

#### **Day 3            Read Revelation 19:6-9**

In what ways will our being with Christ at the end of time be like a wedding?

#### **Day 4            Read Psalm 104:1-15**

Was wine intended to be a blessing or a curse? What (do you think) has happened?

#### **Day 5            Read Genesis 1:3-25**

In the light of yesterday's passage, do you think it likely that the fermentation process has always been possible, or is it a result of man's fall into sinful behaviour? Why?

*Pray that we might be responsive to God's timing in our lives.*

## Study Passage: John 2:1-11

1. Imagine that you are a servant at the wedding. Give a brief description of events from this point of view.
2. Do you think that Mary expects Jesus to perform a miracle? Why/Why not? What does Jesus mean when he answers her as he does in verse 4?
3. What was the effect of this miraculous sign? What **wrong response** might people make to a miraculous event like this?
4. The servants had to go to all the work of filling the large stone pots with water. Why? ... couldn't Jesus have simply made the wine appear there?
5. "He revealed his glory" (verse 11). What glory is this? Is it right to say that **we** have a sort of glory, too?

## **Week 4**

### **THEME:Healing Words**

#### **Day 1            Read John 4:1-15**

What do you think is the tone of the woman's comment in verse 9? How would you have reacted if this sort of remark was made to you? (Be honest!)

#### **Day 2            Read John 4:16-26**

"The Jews are right. You Samaritans don't know what you're talking about" is a reasonable paraphrase of Jesus' subtle comment in verse 9. Yet she takes no offence at this. Why?

#### **Day 3            Read John 4:27-38**

Why did the townspeople come to see Jesus?

#### **Day 4            Read John 4:39-45**

Why did the townspeople believe in Jesus?

#### **Day 5            Read John 20:19-29**

Why are Christians living after the time of Jesus particularly blessed?

*Pray (if you're game) that God would deepen your faith.*

## Study Passage: John 4:46-54

1. Describe an occasion when somebody asked/expected that you trust them, but you were unwilling to give that trust. Why were you unwilling? On reflection, do you still think that your decision was the correct one?
2. Did the man believe that Jesus could heal his son? Yes No. What does he say to Jesus that reveals his level of trust/mistrust?
3. Is Jesus willing to accept a faith that is based on the miracles he does? (see 10:38) Yes No. What then is meant by the critical comment of verse 48?
4. Read about a similar event in Luke 7:1-10. How does this official in John's gospel compare with the centurion?
5. What might be the consequences if you were to pray for a deeper faith? (eg, see Genesis 12:1-4)

## **Week 5**

### **THEME:Losing Perspective**

#### **Day 1            Read John 5:19-24**

How do we show that we are honouring God? What implication does this have for sincere, good-living Muslims, Jews and Buddhists?

#### **Day 2            Read John 5:25-29**

The voice of the Son of Man will have great effects. What are they? Why would this have been a powerful claim to make to this particular audience? (see 5:8)

#### **Day 3            Read John 5:30-40**

What witnesses does Jesus claim to be testifying on his behalf? In a court of law, is it the task of a witness to persuade ... to win over people's minds? Who has that job?

#### **Day 4            Read John 16:2-11**

What task does the Holy Spirit have? When someone is converted after hearing our words or seeing the way we live, what has really happened?

#### **Day 5            Read John 5:41-47**

What contradictory behaviour does Jesus accuse people of (verse 44)? In what ways may we be guilty of the same sort of thing?

*Pray that we might be able to discern the difference between matters of eternal significance and matters whose importance is a passing thing.*



## **Week 6**

**THEME: "You're not gonna believe this ...?"**

**Day 1            Read John 6:25-34**

Why do you think that they ask for a sign (verse 30) when they have just been miraculously fed?

**Day 2            Read John 6:35-40**

What promises do you find in this passage? What encouragement does each of these give?

**Day 3            Read John 6:41-51**

What difficulty do the Jews have with Jesus (verses 41-42)? How may we make the same mistake?

**Day 4            Read John 6:52-59**

To be a church attender only is not enough, according to Jesus' words. What black-and-white statement does he make regarding eternal life?

**Day 5            Read John 6:60-71**

What do you think made many of his disciples stop following him? How does this challenge you?

*Thank God for the things he has shown you in this study series so far, and ask for his help to respond in the right way to these.*

## Study Passage: John 6:1-15

1. Have you been away from home for the day, and when meal time came, made the discovery that food was not available? What happened?

2. John makes sure that we are aware of a few basic facts:  
the size of the need  
the amount available to meet the need  
the ability of human resources to meet the need  
the degree to which the need was met

Note down where we find information on each of these.  
What do you deduce about Jesus from these facts?

3. It's possible to come to an appropriate conclusion about Jesus, but still respond in a wrong way. How do the crowd do this? How may we do this? (see also verses 25-31 and Deuteronomy 18:15-18)

4. Why does Jesus go back to the mountain alone? When may it be helpful for us to withdraw from things to be alone for a while?

5. A sign (any sign) is meant to be believed and followed. What insights does this description of Jesus as "bread" give about belief in him? With the feeding of the 5,000 in mind, what will it mean if Jesus is "bread" to me?

## **Week 7**

### **THEME: "While the billows roll"**

#### **Day 1            Read Jonah 2:2-9**

What does this indicate about the attitude of the Israelites to the sea?

#### **Day 2            Read Amos 6:12; Psalm 46:1-3**

What do these indicate about the attitude of the Israelites to the sea?

#### **Day 3            Read Exodus 14:5-8; 21-29**

What does this incident show about God and his relationship to the sea?

#### **Day 4            Read Job 9:1-10**

What would the act of walking on the sea suggest to people who knew and believed the old scriptures?

#### **Day 5            Read Matthew 14:28-33**

How does Matthew's description of this event differ from the one John gives us?

*Pray that we will be able to trust in Jesus' promise to be with us, even when things are chaotic and his presence isn't obvious.*



## **Week 8**

### **THEME:Rejection**

#### **Day 1            Read John 9:4**

What does this verse mean. Have a go at putting it in your own words.

#### **Day 2            Read II Kings 5:1-14**

Did the Jordan River have healing powers? Why was Naaman sent to wash seven times in it? Did this treatment for his disease make sense to him?

#### **Day 3            Read John 8:12-20**

How does Jesus describe himself? How does he refer to God? What does "Siloam" mean (9:7)?

#### **Day 4            Read John 8:34-47**

Hostility to the gospel is evidence of ... what?

#### **Day 5            Read John 10:1-6**

What response characterises Jesus' own people? How does your own experience tally with this?

*Think of someone you know who has had the gospel explained but seems to be blind to its implications for them personally. Pray that Jesus would remove this blindness.*

## Study Passage: John 9:1-34

1. What are some similarities between physical blindness and spiritual blindness?
2. How does Jesus' attitude to the blind man contrast with that of the disciples? Although we don't have miraculous healing powers, how can we imitate Jesus in this?
3. Scan through the passage and find the questions asked to the blind man after he's been healed. Note down the replies he gives each time. What do you notice?
4. The questions asked by the Jews to the blind man and his parents imply various reasons for rejecting this as an authentic divine miracle (and therefore for rejecting Jesus). What are some of these? What **unstated** reasons might there be?
5. "Always be prepared to give a defence for the hope that is within you" (paraphrase of I Peter 3:15). What is commendable in the man's way of dealing with the Jews? What in his example ought we avoid?

## **Week 9**

### **THEME: "Yet shall he live"**

#### **Day 1            Read Luke 6:33-34**

How does Jesus describe himself? Which people are (rightly) the centre of attention at a wedding?

#### **Day 2            Read Luke 10:38-42**

Why is Mary's choice (which would be the irresponsible thing in most cases) the right one on this occasion?

#### **Day 3            Read John 12:1-11**

Why was Judas' objection (even if it was genuine) not valid on this day?

#### **Day 4            Read Luke 19:28-40**

The crowds' action was politically incorrect. The Pharisees were acutely aware of this. What reason does Jesus give in overruling the Pharisees' objection?

#### **Day 5            Read John 12:12-19**

What effects did this most recent of Jesus' signs have on people? (see also verses 9-11)

*Pray for grace to deal appropriately with death when it affects us.*

## Study Passage: John 11:1-44

1. What would be your response if the grave of someone from your family was found vandalised?

What if you subsequently discovered that the “vandal” was the person him/herself, and that they weren’t dead after all?

2 (a) What does Jesus do when he hears of Lazarus’ illness? Why?

2 (b) How does this miracle differ from the other times Jesus raises a dead person (Luke 7:11-16; 8 41-56)?

3. Mary and Martha are believers struggling with doubt and disbelief. How does Jesus deal with each of them?

4. What lies behind the comments made by the mourners (verses 36-37)?

5. Does this sign affect your attitude to death and dying? If so ... how? If not ... why might that be?

## **Week 10**

### **THEME: True Believers**

#### **Day 1            Read John 13:12-17**

The genuine believer will be a disciple, or learner. What is one way in which genuine belief will show itself in the disciple's life?

#### **Day 2            Read John 13:31-35**

What ought to be obvious about those who truly believe in Jesus? How is this a "new" commandment (see also Matthew 22:37-40)?

#### **Day 3            Read John 15:1-6**

What things can you say about the genuine believer's relationship to Jesus?

#### **Day 4            Read John 15:7-11**

What is Jesus' "recipe" for joy?

#### **Day 5            Read John 15:18-25**

What can genuine believers expect to happen? Why?

*Pray for the grace to be more than a believer in name only.  
Ask Jesus for a deepening relationship with him.*

## Study Passage: John 12:20-43

1. What do the Greeks ask for? What is significant about this request coming when it does (ie what else is happening in this chapter)?
2. What reasons are there for Jesus urging the people as he does in verses 35-36? What eventually happens? How is this exhortation relevant to people in our own day?
3. What effect are the signs meant to have (verses 37-43)? How do people respond? What reasons are there for this?
4. What reasons does Jesus give for being a believer (verses 44-50)? Select one or two of these, and express them in a way that might better sense to people you mix with.
5. “Many did not believe in him” (verse 37). Yet in spite of this minimal response, what was Jesus able to say about this stage of his ministry (verses 27-28)? What relevance does this have for us?