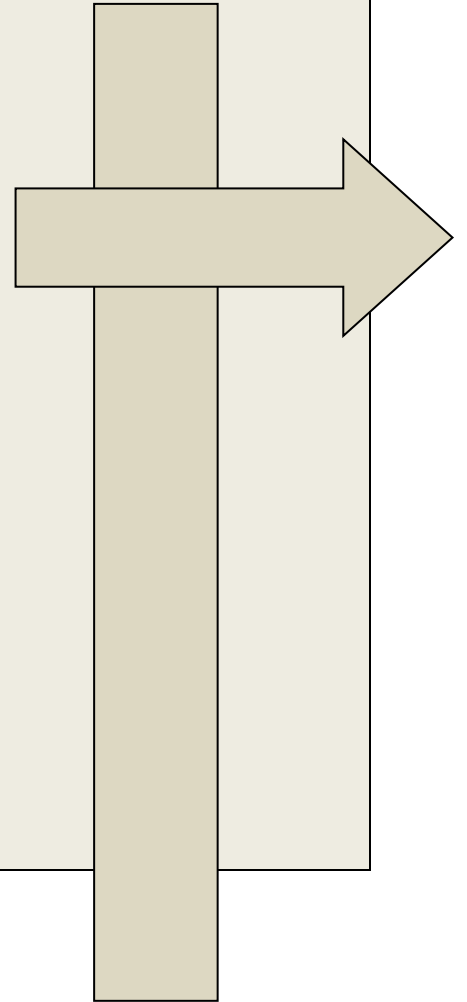


SEVEN

**SIGNS
IN
JOHN'S
GOSPEL**



**St Luke's
Summer 2026**

An Introduction to St John's Gospel

We are majoring on the Gospel of John this "summer" term. Sunday morning sermons are focusing on the seven "I am's" and Connect Groups on the seven signs. By way of introduction, here are a few notes on the Gospel of John: -

A: It's different!

St John is markedly different from the other Gospels. Consider these areas of differences: -

(i) Omissions

In John, there is NO

- story of the conception or birth
- baptism of Jesus
- temptations
- parables
- transfiguration

(ii) Additions

- John records 7 miracles and 5 of those are "new ones."
- In John there are 7 "I am" statements
- John has long discussions, even arguments
- There are extra details in John: - e.g.
 - the loaves which the lad brought to Jesus were barley loaves (6:9)
 - as the disciples crossed the lake in the storm, they had rowed between 3 and 4 miles (6:19)
 - this Gospel tells of the crown of thorns (19:5)
 - this writer tells of 4 soldiers gambling for the seamless robe as Jesus died (19:23)
 - we are told the exact weight of the myrrh and aloes which were used to anoint the dead body of Jesus (19:30)

(iii) Geography

Almost all of John is in the South (i.e. centred around Jerusalem where Jesus went for the Festivals.) In the other Gospels, Jesus has 30 months in the North, and 6 months in the South.

(iv) People

Jesus changed His style depending where He was: -

- in the North, in Galilee, the common people heard Him gladly - when He talked to those crowds, He gave lots of parables (Matthew, Mark and Luke)
- but St John has Jesus in Jerusalem; and the "Jews" in his Gospel were the religious and political leaders in this city who opposed Him.

B: Why is it different?

John writes his Gospel later in the first Century than Matthew, Mark and Luke, and there are particular circumstances which he is addressing: -

- (a) Faith diminished: there are by then, some third or even fourth generation Christians around, and perhaps their fire is going out
- (b) Gospel distorted: other philosophies have now had time to get mixed in with the Gospel, especially with regard to the person and work of Jesus

C: The philosophical challenge towards the end of the First Century

St John writes into a culture that is steeped in Greek thought. That philosophy had the notion of two worlds: -

- The Other World – which is made up of reality
- Our World – which is made up of shadows and copies of reality.

St John shows that **Jesus is reality** come to earth. “Alethinos” is a Greek word, commonly occurring in John, and often translated “true.” More accurately it means “real” – so, Jesus is the real light, the real bread, the real vine.

D: Understanding Jesus

Over the centuries, some have seen Jesus as: -

- more divine than human
- or more human than divine
- or partly human, partly divine

But St John tells us that **Jesus is ... fully human and fully divine**

(i) fully human!

In this Gospel, the full humanity of Jesus is clearly seen: Jesus weeps, is hungry, thirsty, and tired. In this Gospel, we see the prayer life of Jesus, and the intimacy that He had with the Father.

(ii) fully divine!

In this Gospel the full divinity of Jesus is clearly seen through: -

- the 7 witnesses who call Him the Son of God (John the Baptist, Nathaniel, Jesus Himself, Peter, Martha, Thomas, St John)
- the 7 works/signs of Jesus (water into wine, a nobleman's son is healed, Bethesda cripple healed, feeding the 5,000, walking on the water, healing a man born blind, bringing Lazarus back to life from the dead)
- the 7 "I am statements" (bread of heaven; light of the world; good shepherd; door of the fold; resurrection and the life; way, the truth and the life; true vine)

E: Purpose of the Book

In John 20:30-31 we read

“Jesus performed many other 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 Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Greek has a present continuous tense for verbs which is not easily translated into English. It means to be continually doing something. That is used in this verse. So, a more accurate reading would be

“These are written that you may *go on believing* that Jesus is the Son of God and by *going on believing* you will *go on having* life.”

This is an encouragement to believers to have **an ongoing trust and obedience**.

F: A simple outline of the Gospel

Prologue (1:1–18)

The Word (Logos) becomes flesh.
Jesus revealed as divine, full of grace and truth

The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50)

Introduction (1:19–51): John the Baptist's witness and the first disciples.
Signs & Conflicts (2:1–12:50): Seven miracles reveal Jesus' identity, sparking controversy.
Key Teachings: "I Am" statements (Bread of Life, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, etc.).
Conclusion of Public Ministry (12): Triumphal entry and plotting against Jesus.

The Book of Glory (13:1–20:31)

The Upper Room (13–17): Last Supper, washing disciples' feet, new commandment, promises of the Holy Spirit, and the High Priestly Prayer.
Arrest and Trials (18:1–19:16): Betrayal in Gethsemane, Peter's denial, and trial before Pilate.
Crucifixion and Burial (19:17–42): Death on the cross ("It is finished").
Resurrection (20): Empty tomb, appearances to Mary Magdalene and disciples, Thomas' confession.

Epilogue (21:1–25)

Appearance by the Sea of Galilee.
Reinstatement of Peter and the future of the beloved disciple.
Purpose Statement (20:30–31): The book is written to encourage belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief, readers may have life.

G: The religious leaders of the day

The Synoptic Gospels (i.e. Matthew, Mark and Luke) use the term "**Jews**" rarely. However John's Gospel uses it 70 times. Generally, John uses the word to describe the Jewish leaders in Judea (i.e. the South) who are hostile to Jesus

The **Pharisees** belonged to a group that defined righteousness as observing every detail of the traditional rules. They were relatively small in number, but had great influence in first century Judaism

The **Sadducees** were a group closely identified with the priestly aristocracy. They rejected the traditions of the elders held by the Pharisees. They denied the resurrection.

The **Scribes** or teachers of the law were a class of professional exponents of the law who might belong to the Sadducee party or the Pharisee party

"**Rabbi**" is a respectful form of address for all teachers. In the days of Jesus it was not a fixed title for academically trained and ordained scribes, as it is in our day.

The Romans had ruled Israel since 36BC. Where it was possible the Romans would have a provincial governor who represented Roman authority, but sought to keep in place the local administrative system. The **Sanhedrin** acted as ruling body for the Jewish people, both at the local level (a lesser Sanhedrin consisted of 23 members in every town that had at least 120 adult male Jews) and the national level (The Great Sanhedrin). This consisted of 71 members, following the pattern of 70 elders and Moses. The Great Sanhedrin was made up of members of the nobility (Sadducee, both priestly and lay) and scholars in the law (mainly Pharisees).

H: Why do we have 4 Gospels?

Some people wonder why we have 4 Gospels. To answer that question, it is helpful to consider two occupations: photography and biography. The photographer and the biographer both see something from different angles: -

(a) Photography

- to do justice to St Paul's Cathedral you need to take several photographs from different angles.

So

to do justice to Jesus we need several photos - thus 4 Gospels

(b) Biography

- when someone famous dies, the first book or books are what he/she did
- then, some time later, as further reflection takes place, another book or group of books emerge, about what he/she said
- but then some time later still, a biography is written about what the person was, examining their character and motivation

So

- 1 St Mark - the action Gospel - was written first
- 2 St Matthew and St Luke - the words of Jesus - were written later
- 3 St John - what Jesus is like from the inside - came later still

I: Synoptic Gospels

The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels. The word comes from two Greek words which mean "to see together."

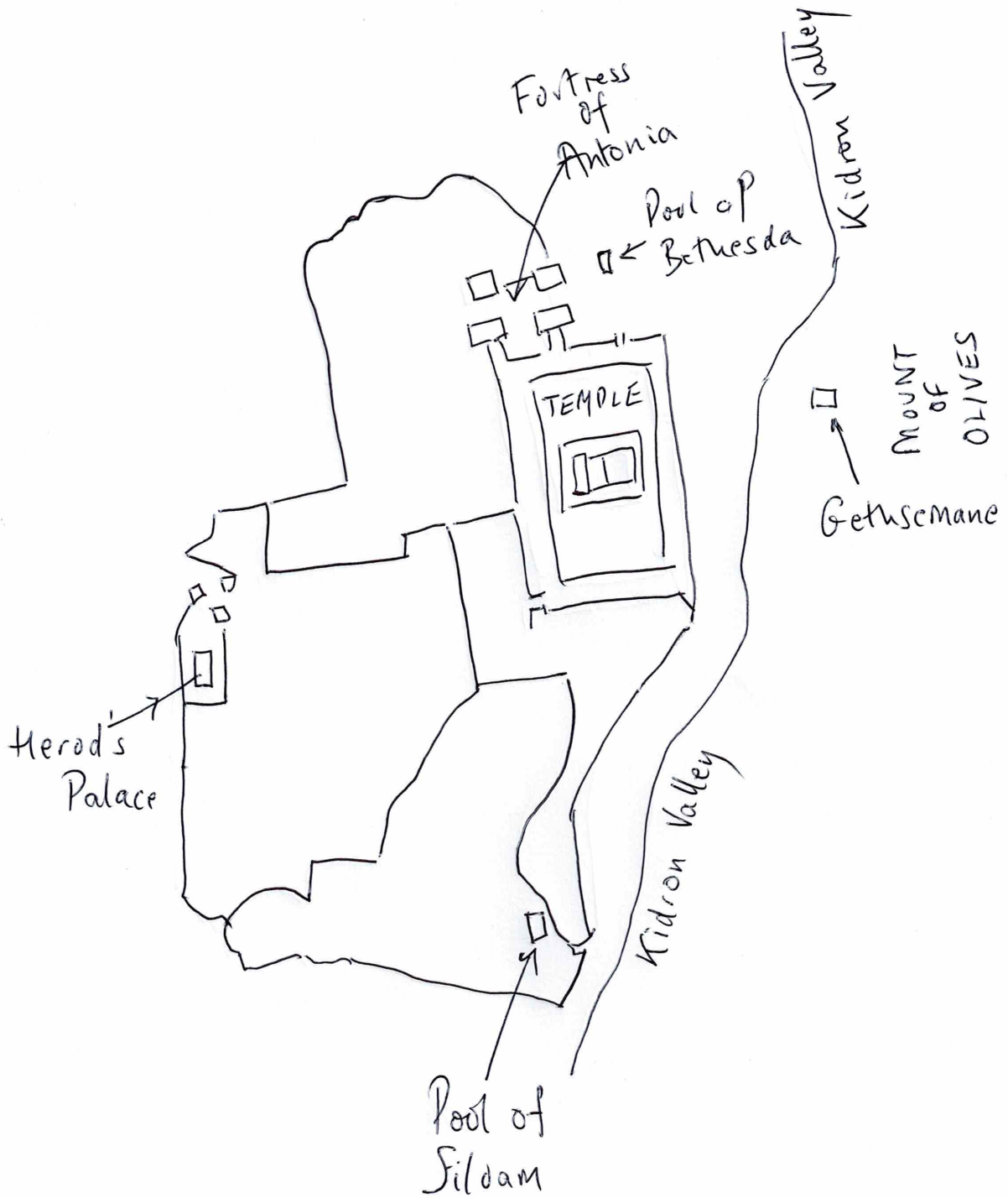
What that actually means is that these gospels contain many of the same stories, and that those stories are sometimes even presented in the same sequence within each of the three different synoptic gospels.

Connect Groups

- My prayer is that these notes will help both groups and individuals to be more like Jesus!
- It is helpful if group members read the passage before your meeting.
- I have included something to pray/do/consider at the end of each section. If the Group is feeling brave, you may like to discuss how this worked out for you at the next meeting!
- I suspect, as usual, there will be spelling and grammatical errors in these notes, and some wrong Biblical references. I am sure you can cope with that!

Andrew Cullis – Easter 2026





Jerusalem at the time
of Jesus

The Seven Signs in John's Gospel

In Acts 2:22, where St Peter is preaching on the Day of Pentecost, we read this verse: -

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”

- “Miracles” emphasise the divine origin
- “Wonders” express an awesome, unexplained event
- “Signs” indicates a significant event – a sign

The usual Greek word used for miracles in the New Testament is **dynamis** (pronounced dun-a-mis) from which we get English words such as “dynamic” and “dynamite.”

However John uses a different Greek word, **semeion** (pronounced say-may-on) which means sign.

When the word “Sign” is used in the Synoptic gospels, it is generally in a negative way and associated with the hostility of Jesus’ opponents. But it works differently in John’s Gospel.

A: The Seven Signs

There are seven signs in this Gospel: -

- Jesus turns water into wine (2:1-11)
- Jesus heals the official's son (4:46-54)
- Jesus healing the lame man at Bethesda (5:1-15)
- Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:1-15)
- Jesus walks on water (6:15-25)
- Jesus healing the man born blind (9:1-8)
- Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (11:1-46)

(Note: not all Bible commentators agree on what should be included in the seven signs: some have the cleansing of the temple, instead of the walking on the water)

The number of signs he chose would have particular significance for the first readers who would be aware that the number seven was regarded as the perfect number, symbolising completeness.

B: The Purpose of the signs

We read in John 20:30-31

“Jesus performed many other 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 Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

John clearly states that Jesus performed many “signs” but he has included these particular ones to enable readers to believe in Jesus.

The signs of Jesus proved that He is the Christ, the Son of God. When Jesus performed a sign, He was making the case for who He is. Some commentators have seen that John’s Gospel is like a legal brief, arguing that we should believe in Jesus. He sifted through all the existing evidence and presented his audience with the best possible case – and at the centre are these signs.

The seven signs are like building blocks of evidence – each adds to the weight of evidence – and they culminate in the seventh sign, the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

For John, these events are not just miracles, but signs that point to who Jesus really is.

As we read in 2:11, this first sign at Cana had two functions: -

- His glory is revealed
- Faith is inspired

Those same functions can be attributed to all the seven signs.

C: The “sevens” in John’s Gospel

Bible writers have noticed that in the Gospel of John there are: -

- 7 witnesses
- 7 signs
- 7 sayings (the “I am” statements)

I have enclosed a chart (on the next page) as to how this works out in the various chapters.

Chapters	7 Witnesses	7 Signs	7 Sayings
1	The Lamb of God - John the Baptist (1:29)		
1	The Son of God - Nathaniel (1:43-51)		
2		Turning water into wine (2:1-11)	
3			
4		Healing of official's son (4:43-5:4)	
5		Healing of man at pool (5:1-16)	
6	The Holy One of God - Peter (6:69)	Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-15)	Bread of life (6:35)
6		Walking on water (6:16-21)	
7			
8			
9		Healing the blind man (9:1-6)	Light of the world (8:12; 9:5)
10			The Gate (10:7, 9)
10			The Good shepherd (10:11, 14)
10	I and the Father are one - Jesus (10:30)		
11	The Christ, the Son of God - Martha (11:27)	Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)	Resurrection and Life (11:25-26)
12			
13			
14			Way, truth and life (14:6-7)
15			The Vine (15:1, 5)
16			
17			
18			
19			
20	My Lord and my God - Thomas (20:28)		
21	The Christ, the Son of God - John (20:31)		

**The Identity of Jesus in John's Gospel is shown through: -
The 7 witnesses – The 7 signs – The 7 Sayings (I am's)**

The first sign – Jesus turns water into wine

John 2:1-12

The best is yet to come

Question 1

What is the most unusual wedding you have been to?

A: The Setting - Verses 1-2

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

We don't know the actual location of Cana of Galilee, but it would seem to be a village near Nazareth. The other biblical references to Cana are also in John: John 4:46, which mentions that Jesus is visiting Cana when he is asked to heal the son of a royal official who lives in Capernaum; and John 21:2 where it is mentioned that Nathanael came from Cana.

In the days of Jesus marriage began with a betrothal up to a year before the wedding celebrations. The man and women would enter into a binding agreement to marry, much more binding than our "engagements" that we have in modern western culture.

In Palestine a wedding was a notable occasion. The festivities could last for a week, and the entire village would be invited. It seems likely that Mary's invitation to the wedding would be because she was a relative of the bride or groom.

Question 2

What does Jesus' attendance at this wedding festival tell us about Him? How can we apply that understanding to our own lives?

B: Mary and Jesus

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

There is no mention of Joseph. The most likely explanation is that Joseph has died by this date.

Wine was essential to the celebrations. Not that people easily got drunk in those days, for the wine would be two parts of wine to three parts of water. Hospitality was a sacred duty, and running out of wine would be a terrible shame for the bride and the groom.

Writing for non-Jewish readers, John explains about the stone water jars. Water was required for two purposes. First, it was needed for cleansing the feet on entry to the house. Secondly, it would be required for the hand washing – strict Jews would wash their hands before a meal and between each course.

Archaeologists have discovered several stone jars from the first century AD. They are about 2 feet high and held about 17 gallons. So six stone jars filled to the brim would be more than 500 of our modern wine bottles! How long would it have taken for the servants to get enough water (from the local well?) to fill the jars?

Question 3

So far, in John's Gospel, Jesus has not performed any miracles. Why do you think that Jesus' mother involves Him when the wine runs out?

Question 4

Has there been a time when you sensed a prompting from God, but it didn't seem to make sense? How did it work out?

C: Water into wine - verses 8-10

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

In John's Gospel there is often a "secondary meaning" to the words. Some writers wonder about the words "the best till now.." as symbolic that Jesus is bringing in a new (Messianic) era.

Question 5

What does the quality of the wine tell us about the glory of Jesus?

What does the quantity of wine tell us about the glory of Jesus?

Question 6

Can you think of a specific instance when God provided for you?

Question 7

How has Jesus given you the best wine in your own life?

D: Faith and Glory - Verses 11-12

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

Question 8

What does this sign tell us about Jesus' glory and how does this help us, like the disciples, to put our faith in Him?

Question 9

What specific sign (small or large) helped you to make your first steps in faith?

For the week ahead – something to consider ...

With Jesus able to transform the ordinary into the finest, what "ordinary" part of your life would you like Him to transform?

P.S.

I have sometimes wondered about this quote, purportedly from Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian: -

"Christ turned water into wine, but the church has succeeded in doing something even more difficult: it has turned wine into water."

This story from Cana reminds me of a song by Graham Kendrick – perhaps you can use it as a prayer or a meditation: -

One shall tell another
And he shall tell his friend
Husbands, wives and children
Shall come following on
From house to house in families
Shall more be gathered in
And lights will shine in every street
So warm and welcoming

*Come on in and taste the new wine
The wine of the kingdom
The wine of the kingdom of God
Here is healing and forgiveness
The wine of the kingdom
The wine of the kingdom of God*

Compassion of the Father
Is ready now to flow
Through acts of love and mercy
We must let it show
He turns now from His anger
To show a smiling face
And longs that men should stand beneath
The fountain of His grace

He longs to do much more than
Our faith has yet allowed
To thrill us and surprise us
With His sovereign power
Where darkness has been darkest
The brightest light will shine
His invitation comes to us
It's yours and it is mine

Graham Kendrick
Copyright © 1981 Thankyou Music

The second sign - Jesus heals the official's son

John 4:43-54

Perfect timing

Question 1

Have there been times when you felt really powerful? And times when you felt really powerless?

A: Background

(a) The official

In this story we meet a royal official. This means that he was connected to the court of the King (Herod) and was someone with wealth and influence – he had access to power. But in his present circumstances he is powerless and comes to Jesus

Hearing that Jesus is in Cana, this important official rushes up the road from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 20 miles, and a rise from the Sea of Galilee of about 1250 feet. So this was a good two days' journey on foot – though probably less on horseback since this man was a wealthy official.

This official would be in the service of Herod Antipas (who reigned 4BC to 39 AD) – he was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. We know of two early believers who had connections with Herod: Joanna, whose husband managed Herod's household (Luke 8:3) and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod (Acts 13:1)

(b) Jesus

You may like to refer to a map to see the geography of this part of John's Gospel.

Jesus had been in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration (2:13), teaching and performing miracles, as well as clearing the Temple. In chapter 3 we read of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Jesus and the disciples then travel through the Judean countryside (3:27f) before coming into Samaria, and the conversation with the women at the well. Then Jesus is in Galilee and back in Cana

B: Jesus back in Cana – verses 43=48

⁴³ After the two days he left for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country.) ⁴⁵ When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.

⁴⁶ Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

⁴⁸ “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

Question 2

Why do you think that John records what Jesus had said – see verse 44? (see Matthew 13:57 and Luke 4:24). Have you experienced occasions of rejection because of your faith?

Question 3

Many of the Galileans believed mainly because they had seen some miracles? In what ways do miracles help build faith? Why does only seeing miracles not build a mature faith?

Question 4

Why does Jesus rebuke them in 4:48? How might that apply to us?

C: The official and Jesus – verses 49-54

⁴⁹ The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

⁵⁰ “Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.”

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.”

⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed.

⁵⁴ This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Question 5

What do we learn about the royal official’s faith from his actions? Why did he travel 20 miles from Capernaum to Cana? Then he takes Jesus at His word and departs home. What does this tell us about his faith?

Question 6

What does the official ask Jesus to do and what does Jesus do instead? And what lesson is there for us in this respect?

Question 7

Why do you think that John includes the details that the healing happened at the exact time Jesus said “your son will live?” What did that convey to official? Have you experienced some “perfect timing” in your journey with Jesus?

Question 8

This is the second “sign” in Cana. In what ways does this story reveal something about Jesus? And how is it different from turning water into wine?

For the week ahead ...

Notice how the official’s faith grows.

- First, he believed enough to ask Jesus to help his son.
- Second, he believed Jesus’ assurance that his son would live, and he acted on it.
- Third, he and his whole house believed in Jesus.

Faith is a gift that grows as we use it. In what ways might you grow your faith in the coming days?

You may like to use this Prayer

Lord, thank you that you honour a small amount of faith. Help us to believe you for more than we do now. We pray that our faith will grow. Help us to learn to take you at your word, even when we don’t see immediate results. Amen.

The third sign - Jesus heals a lame man

John 5:1-18

Healing and Wholeness

Question 1

Have you waited a long time for something? What was your response when the waiting was over?

A: Background

There were three Jewish festivals which were feasts of obligation. Every adult male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to attend them. These Feasts were Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles

There is no mention of the disciples in this account so perhaps Jesus is alone when He comes to Jerusalem for the festival – and John does not name which festival this is.

The pool is known as the Pool of Bethesda (meaning House of Mercy) or Pool of Bethzatha (meaning House of the olive)

For centuries people would pour scorn on John's account as there was no evidence that the location existed. But then in 1888 a German archaeologist unearthed a large tank matching the biblical description. It was located near the Sheep Gate and had five covered colonnades.

Some manuscripts include a verse 4-

“and they waited for the moving of the waters. ⁴ From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.”

However the oldest and best manuscripts do not contain this reference to the angel which is why verse 4 is missing from the majority of modern translations.

You can imagine the rather desperate scene. Those who were lame saw the water stirring but couldn't get into the water – those who were blind, couldn't see what was happening but could have got there.

A: Helplessness and Christ's power – verses 1-9

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ^[4]

⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Question 2

There were probably many people around the Pool. Why might Jesus have chosen this person out of all the others?

Question 3

In verse 6 we learn that Jesus did three things before healing the man. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Question 4

What is the significance of the question “do you want to get well?” Does this have a lesson for us?

B: Difficulties with the “Sabbath Police” – verse 10-18

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began

to persecute him. ¹⁷In his defence Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” ¹⁸For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

There were 39 categories of forbidden labour on the Sabbath under Jewish religious law of the day. This story is in the category covering “Domains.” The core of the rule is that you cannot move an object from one domain to another – for instance, from your house to the street. Or carry an object a certain distance within a public domain. This applied to a range of objects, including a wallet, a key, and a mat. It was allowable to carry a man on a bed on the Sabbath, but not to carry a bed without a man on it!

Question 5

How did the Jewish religious leaders miss the truth about Jesus even though they saw His power to heal?

Question 6

Are there occasions when our fixed beliefs or traditions might close our eyes to what God can do?

Question 7

Jesus “slips away” (verse 13) and then searches the man out (verse 14) – what does this tell us about Jesus? What can we learn from this?

Question 8

In the Scriptures sickness is occasionally associated with sin, but not always. What do you think Jesus meant when He said to the man “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

For the week ahead

Have you grown weary of waiting patiently for something? What might God be saying to you?

You may like to use part of Psalm 40 as a prayer: -

I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
²He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
³He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.

The fourth sign – Jesus feeds the five thousand

John 6:1-15

Huge task, tiny resources

Question 1

Have you ever given something away – like your lunch, or a toy? How did you feel about that?

A: In all four gospels

The story of the feeding of the five thousand occurs in all four gospels – though with slightly different wording and emphases.

- Matthew 14:13-21
- Mark 6:30-44
- Luke 9:10-17
- John 6:1-15

Read the accounts from Mark and John.

Question 2

What similarities and differences do you see in these two accounts?

B: The setting

6 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

This miracle appear to have occurred on a mountainside above the city of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10) in the area known today as the Golan Heights. Bethsaida had been the home of Philip (12:21) and for some of Jesus' disciples for a while (1:44; Mark 1:29). Bethsaida which means “house of fish” or “house of fishermen” is at the northeast end of the Sea of Galilee

John mentions that it was the time of Passover, and indeed there are many links in John 6 with the Exodus story: for instance

- Manna in the wilderness – Jesus feeding the five thousand
- “I am” (Exodus 3:14) and “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)

I think John is saying to us: Jesus is the ultimate positive fulfilment of the Exodus

Question 3

Why do you think that Jesus withdrew with His disciples from the crowds? What lessons does this have for us?

C: Huge task, tiny resources

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Question 4

Philip calculated the cost and saw the impossibility. Andrew brought a small boy's lunch. What do these two reactions reveal about different ways we approach challenges?

D: Jesus blesses the loaves and fish

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

Question 5

Who distributed the loaves and the fish? (see Matthew 14:19). Where do you think the miracle took place? As Jesus prayed? As the disciples went round with the baskets? Is that significant?

E: The left-overs

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

It was a common Jewish tradition to collect the left overs at the end of a meal.

Question 6

The disciples were instructed to collect the left-overs? Why do you think this detail is important in teaching about God's provision? For the disciples? And for us?

F: A sign for the crowd – but of what sort?

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Question 7

The crowd had understood some of who Jesus was and what He came to do – see Deuteronomy 18:15. But they also were very wrong. How can we maintain a right view of Jesus and not superimpose our own unhelpful thoughts?

Question 8

Are there times when you feel that you have little to offer to God? What does this story tell us about that?

For the week ahead

What might you do in the near future to place your "small lunch" in the hands of Jesus?

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, I bring my small loaves and two fish before You—my limited strength, time, and resources. I ask that You multiply my efforts to bring blessing and nourishment to those around me. Amen.

Miracles?

Some years ago, I came across this story which I read in a reliable Catholic publication: -

In December 1972 a group of Catholic Christians were looking at some words in Luke's Gospel – they read

"when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind – and you will be blessed because they are not able to pay you back." Luke 14:12

They decided to go to the poorest they knew - this was those who lived across the border in Mexico, living on a rubbish dump of the city, Juarrez

They arrived at the dump on Christmas Day to find a divided community. There were two factions – not on speaking terms – and neither would enter the territory of the other. So the Christians gathered on neutral land – in the middle – and with both sides hostile. They sang some simple hymns, and then began to share the food they had brought.

They had brought enough food for just over 100 - but there were more than 300 present. The dump people said "let the children eat first"

One of the Christians there, a postman called Frank – wrote: -

"I had doubts we had enough food for all the people who were there. I told one of the workers that the kids were filling up sacks and boxes of food and that we were going to run out. I got on top of my truck to see what was happening. On the tailgate were 2 boneless hams. One lady kept cutting the ham till she tired, and handed the knife to someone else. The ham got smaller, but oh, so slowly. Finally everyone had a big piece of ham. Pockets were stuffed with food and children were carrying sacks away. I yelled out "where's all the food coming from?" On the way home we had enough left over to stop by and leave some at an orphanage."

It seems, as though literally God multiplied the food. But not only that – things have changed. Some time later

People have built their own homes - some have running water - they have a cooperative salvage business. TB which was once rampant is just a bad memory. The children had been unable to learn because of brain damage through protein deficiency but a few years later many children had been healed through prayer and attended a school.

It was extra-ordinary evidence of God's love and power – there was the multiplication of the food, but perhaps an even greater miracle in the people themselves. Once society's rubbish - now ...men and women of Christian dignity and responsibility.

The fifth sign - Jesus walks on the water

John 6:12-21

Unexpected

Question 1

What is the fiercest storm that you have been in?

A: Background

Straight after the feeding of the five thousand, we come to another miraculous sign – but only the disciples experience this sign.

This story appears both in Mark and Matthew, and it is instructive to read both John's account and that of Matthew. I have included both accounts in these notes.

You might ask, "Why did John miss out some of the story (Peter trying to walk on the water)? Perhaps the answer is that John seeks to focus on Jesus and the ways that these signs point to His glory and promote faith in Him (John 2:11).

Jesus sends His disciples ahead across the Sea of Galilee, which is a freshwater lake in northern Israel. There seems to be no thought about how He might join them.

Jesus turns to prayer and from his vantage point He can see the disciples making heavy weather of the crossing due to the strong wind and waves. This was Passover time and that means it was time of a full moon, so Jesus could see from the hillside what was happening on the Lake.

Jesus approaches them round the fourth watch of the night (see Matthew 14:25, King James version) – that is roughly 3am to 6am.

The writer Tom Wright says this: "Curiously enough, only one great picture of this scene has ever been painted - by Conrad Witz in 1444. You might have thought it would make an ideal subject: Jesus as a shimmering figure on the water, frightened disciples huddling in the boat, and Peter, caught between glory and terror, walking on the water towards Jesus and then ... starting to sink. Perhaps devout artists avoided it because it seemed to show up the great apostle in a bad light"

Question 2

What differences do you notice between the accounts in Matthew and John?

B: The storm – verses 12-21

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake,¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them.¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened.²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone.²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Read Matthew's account – 14: 22-36

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

³⁴ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret.³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him³⁶ and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Question 3

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat (Mark 6:45). Have you ever found that following God's direction has led you into something difficult? What did you learn from that experience?

Question 4

Jesus did not come until after 3am – and the disciples had been fighting the storm for hours. Why does God seem to wait until the last minute to intervene?

Question 5

The disciples had just witnessed the feeding of the five thousand. Why do you think it is so easy for us (as for those first disciples) to forget God's faithfulness when faced with a new challenge?

Question 6

What do you reckon the other disciples made of Peter's comment? Matthew 14:28

Question 7

How can we practise keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, when we feel overwhelmed?

Question 8

In terms of success and failure, how would you evaluate Peter, who managed a few steps on the water?

Question 9

This story shows that following Jesus does not mean our lives will be free of storms, but that He will be with us during them. What does that mean for your faith?

In this week ahead

What do you think of this quotation: "do you know how to spell Faith? R. I. S. K!"

There are several allusions in this story to Old Testament passages: for instance: -
Job 9:7-11 and Isaiah 51:10-11

Prayer

A song from the 70's(?) went like this: -

Here comes Jesus, see Him walking on the water,
He'll lift you up and He'll help you to stand;
Oh, here comes Jesus, He's the Master of the waves that roll.
Here comes Jesus, He'll save your soul.

The sixth sign: Jesus heals the blind man

John 9:1-41

Amazing Grace

Question 1

What is your most memorable moment with mud?!

A: Seeing Jesus

There are three “sections” to this story and each reveal a truth about Jesus.

- (a) At first Jesus is simply called a “man” (verse 11)
- (b) Then Jesus is recognised as a “prophet” (verse 7) because the miraculous healing would have called to mind the connection between signs and prophets in the Old Testament (Exodus 4:1-17)
- (c) Finally, Jesus is recognised as the “Son of Man” – and the appropriate response is that of worship (verses 35, 38)

B: The Healing - verses 1-12

Background

To perform this miracle Jesus used spit and earth to make mud and gave the man instructions to go and wash. This was a unique departure from the way we see Jesus normally heal.

There are several suggestions as to the mud: -

- (a) This was an echo of creation, recalling Genesis 2:7 when God formed humanity from the dust of the ground. By using mud Jesus may be symbolically recreating the man’s eyes, restoring what was missing from birth
- (b) It could be an expression of the ordinary and obedience. The blind man had to go and wash. This reminds us that God uses humble means to accomplish what He wants and He invites us to participate.
- (c) It could be to undermine the legalism of the day – Jesus knew that this “work” was a challenge to the rigid rules of the Pharisees.

The Pool of Siloam is in Jerusalem and is a remarkable feat of engineering from the C8 BC. It was rediscovered in 2004 when excavations revealed steps and the remains of a larger reservoir.

In the time of Jesus, the pool had both a practical and spiritual purpose. It was used for pilgrims to purify themselves before going to the temple. In a previous chapter (7) the water which was used in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles would have come from the Pool of Siloam.

In a sense, the pool was a prophetic fulfilment. "Siloam" means "sent" – echoing Jesus' role as the one sent by God (John 9:7)

It is clear in Scriptures that sometimes afflictions do come as a result of sin. However the book of Job shows us that is not always the case. Job's friends insisted that he had sinned, but we read that was not the cause of his problems

Question 2

What ideas lie behind the disciples' question? Curiosity? Compassion? Or ..?

Question 3

Why do you think Jesus healed in different ways? (e.g. laying on of hands, a command, mud on the eyes, fingers in the ears). What does this teach us as we how we pray for others?

Question 4

What do you think the blind man was imagining as he walked with mud smeared on his eyes to the Pool of Siloam down the bottom of the hill?

Question 5

Jesus often invited some sort of active co-operation/ participation (e.g. "get up, take up your bed and walk"). What does this teach us about our own walk with Jesus?

C: The Pharisees investigate - verses 13-34

Disputes over the Sabbath

In the first three Gospels there are several occasions in which we are told that Jesus' actions on the Sabbath gave rise to controversy. In this instance, the Pharisees were concerned that using spittle to make clay constituted breaking the Sabbath law concerning work. Healing on the Sabbath, unless a person was in mortal danger (which was not the case here) was also not allowed.

Jesus summarised His attitude when he said "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 7:27)

In John's Gospel there are three occasions when Jesus has debates concerning the Sabbath: the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (chapter 5), during the feast of Tabernacles (chapter 7) and here in chapter 9

Question 6

In some of the Gospel stories, when Jesus touches someone's life it was a moment of wonder, but also a prelude to trouble. Have you or someone you know experienced that?

Question 7

Why did the man's parents refuse to give an answer to the Pharisees (20-23) ? Are there occasions when we feel we would rather keep quiet than tell the truth?

Question 8

What do you make of the blind's man testimony? (verse 24-33) What can we learn from it ourselves?

D: Spiritual blindness - verses 35-41

Prophecies

The book of Isaiah has a number of quotations about the coming Messiah curing blindness: - look up Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7

Question 9

What is it about the man's present circumstances that cause Jesus to seek Him out? What might we learn from this?

Question 10

Were the Pharisees responsible for their hard hearts and spiritual blindness? What about people today?

In the week ahead ...

Over the next week reflect on the ways in which this line from the hymn "Amazing Grace" impacts your life: -

"I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see."

Think about this

The atmosphere of this chapter is highly charged. The neighbours are sceptical (v 8-9), the parents are unsupportive (v 18-23), and the religious authorities are aggressive (vv 13-34) – but the blind man hangs on! See John 16:33 for encouraging words from Jesus to help us with our tenacity.

You may like to use this hymn as a prayer

1. Amazing grace! how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me:
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

4. The Lord has promised good to me;
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

5. When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

John Newton

The Seventh Sign - Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

John 11:1-57

Death loses its sting

Question 1

What is something you thought was "completely over" but later surprised you?

A: Jesus delays His journey – verses 1-16

Sisters Mary and Mary and their brother Lazarus lived in the small village of Bethany, which is about two miles east of Jerusalem, and a convenient stopping off point for Jesus in His travels. Today the village is called Al-Eizariya, which literally means “the place of Lazarus.” It is worth remembering that Jesus had no home of His own. As we read in Luke 9:58 He had nowhere to lay His head. In the home at Bethany Jesus had somewhere where He could relax.

Throughout the gospel of John we read of “glory”

- John 7:39 tells us that the Spirit had not yet come because Jesus was not yet glorified.
- When Greeks came to him, Jesus said “the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.” (John 12:20f)
- The glory of Jesus is supremely associated with the Cross.

It might well have been that the disciples could have refused to follow Jesus, but one voice spoke up –that of Thomas. As one writer says of Thomas “there was not expectant faith, but loyal despair.”

Question 2

Given that Jesus has a close relationship with this home, why does He delay for two days? If you had been one of the disciples hearing that Jesus was going to delay responding, what would be going through your mind?

Question 3

Have you ever felt that God was not listening when you prayed? How did you deal with this?

Question 4

Have you, like Thomas, ever felt Jesus was calling you to do something pretty risky? What happened?

B: Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus – verses 17-37

Normally in Palestine the burial followed death as quickly as passable. The climate made that a necessity. As many as possible would attend the funeral. Everyone joined the procession as a matter of courtesy and respect. Mourning was generally for seven days of which the first three were days of weeping. So when Jesus found a crowd in the house at Bethany this was the normal custom.

Question 5

Both Martha and Mary say to Jesus (verse 21 and 32) – “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” How does this reflect both faith and frustration? Have there been times when you experienced something similar?

Question 6

Jesus said to Martha “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” How do you reflect upon the meaning of these words for you?

Question 7

- Verse 33 “Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.”
- Verse 35 “Jesus wept.” It is the shortest verse in the Bible – just two words.

What do you think these verses show us about Jesus?

C: Jesus Raises Lazarus from the dead - verses 38-44

One of the remarkable aspects of the raising of Lazarus is that he never says one word! However, notice how in the next chapter (John 12:10) the chief priests make plans to kill Lazarus as well.

The stone is moved away – a few weeks later an angel would roll the stone for Jesus’ own tomb. It is instructive how Jesus involves others: “you have a part to play ... roll the stone away ...take off the grave clothes and let him go ..” We have seen previously how this feature of involving others occurs in the seven signs.

The voice of Jesus spoke to His Father in Heaven and Lazarus in Hades. Can you imagine the astonishment of the onlookers as a bandaged figure clambered out of the opening? What a wonderful and perhaps frightening moment!

Question 8

Why do you think Martha’s faith seems to falter (verse 329)? Do we have similar occasions in times of crisis?

D: The Plot to Kill Jesus – verses 45-47

The raising of Lazarus creates two opposing reactions.. On the one hand, it results in many who witness this most extraordinary sign and put their faith in Jesus. He has confirmed for them that He must truly be from God. And in this sign He has revealed something of God's own glory (11:40, 42)

On the other hand, the reaction of the authorities in Jerusalem is entirely different. They are prepared to admit that Jesus really is performing some remarkable miracles. However, they foresee that, as a result, the whole country will come to believe in Him. They think of their self-preservation and the threat to their position of leadership. With this seventh sign, we reach a turning point and John writes the chilling words in verse 53 "so from that day on they plotted to take his life."

Question 9

If you had been on the Sanhedrin how would you have reacted? Would political expedience be a consideration? And what about religious traditions?

Question 10

What did Caiaphas intend to say to the Sanhedrin? What do we think about God using some surprising people to further the work of God? Even when they do so unintentionally?

In the week ahead

Consider this question: What gives you the most comfort and hope regarding your future?

You may like to use this well known hymn as a prayer: -

1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,

Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won;
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave-clothes where Thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won!*

2. Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

3. No more we doubt Thee, glorious prince of life;
Life is naught without Thee; aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conquerors through Thy deathless love,
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.