

“Reading For Life”

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A reflection for the 6th Sunday of Easter

John 20.30-31

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Now Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. These are written so that you may be believers that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by being believers you may have life by means of his name.

John 20,30-31

Adapted from *The Common English Bible*

The very first time I watched *The Princess Bride*, I thought it was a serious faerie tale. But it was terrible. So silly! Later, I realized it was meant to be a silly parody, and I started taking it seriously.

To understand something you are watching or reading, it helps to know what it's for.

It helps to know that pro wrestling is not real while, despite their similarities, American presidential primaries are real, sadly.

When I'm baking, it's good to know that a recipe is a set of instructions I should follow. It's not a dramatic comedy, nor a tragedy . . . yet.

The second Scripture reading, the very short one, comes very near the end of John's Story of Jesus. Hearing it today, we are cheating a bit. Together, we've only dug in as far as the end of chapter 6. During Easter we skipped ahead for some resurrection stories in chapter 20. So we will need to go back to where we left off, because there is so much more treasure for us to mine in the middle.

But first, let's stay skipped-ahead for this little ending. John has much more he could tell about Jesus, and he does tack a bit at the end (chapter 21), but he has told us enough. Enough for his purpose. His purpose is life.

II

With people like us in mind, John starts with this:

In the beginning was the Word, who was with God and who was God. . . .

What came into being through the Word was life,

and the life was the light for all people. . . .

The Word became a human being, and lived among us.¹

¹ 1:1,3b-4,14.

Later, for us, he says:

God loved the world so much, that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him can have deep, lasting life.²

John tells us things Jesus said about himself.

I am the Bread of life.³ . . . the Light of the world.⁴ . . . the Gate.⁵ . . . the Good Shepherd.⁶ . . . the Resurrection and the Life.⁷ . . . the Way, the Truth and the Life.⁸ . . . the Vine who gives life to you, the branches.⁹

John gives us Jesus' words on the cross, as he gave up his life: *"It is finished."*¹⁰ And Mary's on Easter: *"I have seen the Lord, alive!"*¹¹ And Thomas', falling at Jesus' feet: *"My Lord and My God."*¹²

John gives us signs. They point us to who Jesus is.

- Jesus made wine and saved a wedding. He is the life of the party.¹³
- Jesus healed a dying boy. He saves life.¹⁴
- A man could not walk, until Jesus lifted him to his feet and set him strolling off. He restores.¹⁵
- A crowd, hungry in the wilderness, Jesus fed. He provides.¹⁶
- Over the water, Jesus walked. He commands creation.¹⁷

We've already dug into each of these. There are more to come.

- Jesus will heal a blind man. He makes us see.¹⁸
- Jesus will raise a dead man. He defeats death.¹⁹

Jesus dies on a cross. Jesus rises from the tomb.²⁰

With all these signs, we can see who Jesus is.

² 3:16.
³ 6:35,51.
⁴ 8:12; 9:5.
⁵ 10:7,9.
⁶ 10:11,14.
⁷ 11:25-26.
⁸ 14:6.
⁹ 15:1,5.
¹⁰ 19:30.
¹¹ 20:18.
¹² 20:28.
¹³ 2:1-11.
¹⁴ 4:46-54.
¹⁵ 5:1-16.
¹⁶ 6:1-15.
¹⁷ 6:16-21.
¹⁸ John 9.
¹⁹ John 11.
²⁰ John 18-21.

III

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

The Messiah, God's chosen one. The Messiah gains victory over all that threatens God's people. The Messiah brings God's reign of justice and peace, when everything will flourish. The Messiah is how God keeps God's promises. The Messiah is the Saviour, the Redeemer, the true King. The Messiah, or the Christ, is none other than this Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God.²¹ The Son is the one into whose hands God the Father has placed all things.²² The Son who does his Father's work.²³ The Son, to whom his Father has given life just as the Father has life, and authority just as the Father has authority.²⁴ The Son who is the expression of his Father's love. The Son who gives himself for the life of his Father's beloved world.²⁵ The Son of God is none other than this Jesus.

This Jesus, from a nothing town (Nazareth), and from perhaps history's most hard-pressed people (the Jews) . . . this Jesus is God at work in the world.

This Jesus, who got thirsty, and hungered, and wept is God at work in the world.

This Jesus, who honoured an ostracized woman at a well, and forgave a condemned woman just as the stones were about to fly, is God at work in the world.

This Jesus, crucified, is God at work in the world.

This Jesus, now risen and alive, ascended to the Father and present here with us in the Spirit, is still God at work in the world.

This Jesus.

IV

John wrote to show us this.²⁶ He was so seized by his experience of Jesus, by his realization of who Jesus is, that he had to tell it. So people like you and me would believe. Not simply read or hear, put down and walk away. If you are just looking for some bits of spiritual wisdom here, or inspiring stories, or philosophical points, you will find them all. .

²¹ "Son of God" is another way of saying "messiah." This messianic meaning seems to be the sense in 1:34, 1:49 and 11:27. In each of these cases, it is someone other than Jesus or the narrator who ascribes the title to Jesus. In instances where Jesus speaks of himself as the Son, or the narrator of John's Gospel does, the deeper, identity-with-the-Father sense becomes more striking.

²² 3:36.

²³ 10:36.

²⁴ 5:25f.

²⁵ 3:16-18.

²⁶ For a good discussion about the authorship of the Gospel, see Richard Bauckham's careful analysis in Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), especially chapters 14-17.

. . . But if that is all, you will miss the most important thing.

If this is Jesus —and I'm convinced: by John, by the other ancient documents about Jesus, and a few decades of studying these things. . . . If Jesus is the Messiah. . . . If Jesus is the Son of God. . . . If Jesus is the Lord of celebration, and of life, who restores and provides, who commands creation, conquers death and makes us see. . . . If Jesus is the Bread of life, the Light of the Word, the Shepherd, the Vine, the Resurrection, the Way, the Truth and the Life. . . . If this is Jesus, then there is no way we can put this down and walk away.

If this is Jesus, then the only response I can imagine is to rush with the woman who had met Jesus at the well, blurting out the news about this One she has just met. It's to leap with Mary as she shouts out, "I have seen the Lord." It's to gasp with Thomas, who had doubted, as he praises "My Lord and my God."

V

What will kill your life, even before you die?

- The weight of expectations, which you cannot keep meeting.
- The struggle to simply get by.
- The burden of guilt.
- The emptiness of meaninglessness.
- The futile quest for fulfillment in all those things that, quite simply, cannot deliver.
- The fear of scarcity, that makes us cling to life, hoard it, and steal it from others.
- And yes, the dread fear of death.

All these will kill you life, even while you are supposedly living.²⁷

Jesus, the Lord of life, has come to free you from these, so you can live. Finally live. Live the fullness of life, that can begin now and stretch into eternity. Live everlasting life, in all its abundance and flourishing. Live deep, lasting life.

Life, in this fullest sense, can only happen for you when you trust yourself to the Life-Giver.

*Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs
than are written down in this book.
These are written down so you will believe that
Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and in the act of believing,
have real and eternal life
in the way he personally revealed it.²⁸*

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ John 20:30-31 (The Message)