

The Way, The Truth, The Life

This is my concluding paper to express my great esteem and appreciation for the Gospel of John and its author, and to summarize this witness of God's Realm from the beginning of Creation to the close of the first century of the Common Era. I have read and studied Scripture from a very young age and have passed through many stages of knowledge and understanding about them. As I continue this practice I still look for more insights and awareness of the Divine and the great gift of unconditional love that extends to all people, in all times, and in all places.

I have divided my impression of this Gospel into three sections, The Way, The Truth, and The Life. As the opening introduction to the Gospel of John in The Oxford Study Bible says, *"In Christian tradition John has often been called the spiritual Gospel because of its attention to the spiritual import of the incidents it reports"*. I have learned that spiritual truth is more about entering into an experience rather than a concern for accurate historical facts. As Jesus mentions in his discourses with his disciples in chapter 14:25-26, *"I have told you these things while I am with you; the advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you"*.

It was common in earlier times to use **metaphor** - *[a figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity]* as when Jesus said to his disciples, *"Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves"*. The use of **simile** - *[a figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds (usually formed with 'like' or 'as') like Jesus saying, "be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves"]*. Another was the use of **allegory** - *[a visible symbol representing an abstract idea], similar to a **parable** - [a short moral story (often with animal characters) and particularly in the (New Testament) any of the stories told by Jesus to convey his religious message]*. All of these forms of speech are not related to actual facts as much as pictorial ways of speaking about truth to help us understand and grasp spiritual reality.

In addition to these methods of presentation, especially in scripture, we have to remember that the definitions of the words and language used in former times has changed and may be dramatically different. Because our scriptures were written in several different languages, there is the further problem of translation from one language to another, since certain idioms [the usage or vocabulary that is characteristic of a specific group of people] has no corollary in another language to give proper or adequate expression. Marcus J. Borg, a Canon Theologian at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon and author of numerous books, in his latest book, "Speaking Christian - Why Christian words have lost their meaning and power and how they can be restored", gives us clear explanations about these serious distortions of Biblical meanings then and now. I would strongly suggest that you read this book that could help us end some of the unfortunate divisions that exist because of such misinformation.

Here then is how the Gospel of John has revived my appreciation for God's gift of life to our world and especially God's love for all people, everywhere and in all time.

THE WAY:

The way in John's Gospel begins with the same theme as in the opening chapter in Genesis, "In the beginning, God". John tells us that the Word - (the Verb, in the Spanish Translation) - was with God at the beginning. Words make up our sentences to describe what we are thinking and wanting to say. In the beginning of Creation God's ideas became a reality in the activity of the Big Bang when it all exploded into reality as we know it. This is the allegorical style that the author of the Gospel of John uses throughout to enable us to come to know and

understand the magnificence of all that he wished to share with us. From the beginning, John tells us that Jesus *"was life, and that life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it"*. This may be the first evidence as to why many in the Christian tradition refer to it as the spiritual Gospel.

Before you read any further in this paper, you may want to read a shorter paper on "The Image of God" wherein there is, in the middle of that paper, a more complete explanation of what was referred to in the above paragraph regarding the traditional use of "the Word" in English translations and the use of "the Verb" in the authorized Spanish translations. It may be very helpful to recognize the allegorical style that this spiritual Gospel uses profusely. <http://janddhealth.com/LLYEpi1.htm>

From here our author moves to the introduction of Jesus by "a man named John the Baptist". When the religious leaders inquired of him as to who he was, he simply claimed that he was a voice crying in the wilderness to introduce one who would come after him who was more important than he. As Jesus was baptized by him, as the story goes, there were "signs" following that made John declare that this one named Jesus was the anointed one of whom he spoke. After this Jesus began to have several following him now who would become his disciples. At the end of chapter one Jesus tells them, *"In very truth I tell you all: you will see heaven wide open and God's angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man"*. This is the son of man who would introduce the Kingdom of God to the world and, by his life and actions, show the values and characteristics of God's Realm among all people.

The Gospel of John, in chapters two through eleven, describes The Way of God by using seven distinct signs that notably set forth this Realm.

1. The Wedding. To me this sets forth the theme of God's Realm as being filled with joy and plenty. Marriage is a new beginning - family - formed from older families, extending the family with the new birth of children who would continue the family for many generations. When they ran out of wine for their celebration Jesus makes more wine available, perhaps demonstrating that God's care extends well beyond the immediate family to all who had come to join them in their own personal realm. "God so loved the world that he gave....."
 - o John continues, before the next sign, with an interlude of several points about the cleansing of the Temple from the moneychangers, his confrontation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, the disciples of John the Baptist debating with some Jews about purification, news that Jesus was winning and baptizing more disciples than John, and especially about Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. Each one of these has their own message about the Good News of God's Realm among them that Jesus was announcing and enacting.
2. Healing the ill son of an Officer in the Royal Service. This is a clear sign of God's concern for the health and wellbeing of all people regardless of their stature, function, or ethnic origin. The boy's father was so overwhelmed by the grace of God in Jesus that they became believers.
3. Some time later John tells us that Jesus went to one of the Jewish festivals in Jerusalem. It was there that a man that was blind, lame, and paralyzed was waiting for thirty years for a miracle at the pool named Bethesda. When Jesus saw him he instructed the man to take his bed a walk. When he did he immediately fully recovered. The religious people were annoyed because it was the Sabbath when the man should not be carrying his bed so they began to take action against Jesus who instructed him to break Sabbath law. Then Jesus spoke clearly telling them that the work of God was caring for people and their wellbeing which always outweighed the priority of adhering to matters of the law. As the earliest Gospel says in Mark 2:27, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*
4. Following this episode, John brings us to the feeding of the large crowd of people that gathered to hear

Jesus on the shore of the sea of Galilee. We are told that it was close to the Jewish feast of the Passover so there can be many implications here about God's provisions for both physical and spiritual food for everyone. This sign also tells us that there is always more than enough by gathering the twelve baskets of leftovers along with the importance that nothing be wasted.

5. In the drama of the crowds moving to another place along the sea of Galilee as they continued to follow Jesus and his disciples after this great provision, we see the presence of God in another unusual way. Jesus saw that the crowds were planning to seize him to proclaim him king so he withdrew to the hills by himself. It was nightfall when his disciples went down to the sea to set off in a boat to Capernaum. A strong wind caused the disciples to fearful concern with very rough seas and we are told that they were terrified. When Jesus came to their assistance telling them not to be afraid we are told, "immediately the boat reached the land they were making for." Not only did Jesus walk on the sea to reach them but, as he was boarding, they immediately reached the shore. This sign reminds me of scripture in Hebrews 13:5 where God says, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*
 - o As we might expect, Jesus goes on to teach the people as he travelled around in Galilee. In chapter seven and eight there is controversy about Jesus and his teaching. Jesus avoided Judaea, we are told, because the authorities were looking for a chance to kill him. There were those in the crowd who knew this and they were confused about Jesus and his teaching. Jesus challenged the power structures of his time, both religious and political, as he offered in word and deed the knowledge and example of God's love and care for all people in all times and places. This is what drew people to him and what frightened those who were being challenged as those who were oppressing others.
6. In chapter nine another sign is placed before them about seeing and believing. A man who was born blind received his sight when Jesus made a paste to place on his eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The disciples questioned why he was born blind, his family and neighbors were amazed, and the religious leaders were annoyed, to say the least, because Jesus did this on the Sabbath. How could a person who claimed to be of God go against the laws of God? At the end, when Jesus confronted the Pharisees, he revealed their spiritual blindness to see beyond their legalistic view.
 - o In chapter ten the dialogue continues with the leadership and the people about who Jesus is and what he is really about. Using the image of the Good Shepherd as contrasted by bad shepherds Jesus tries to clarify his mission. Unfortunately, with all the uproar and confusion about him, his words once again caused a division among the Jews. There was another attempt to seize Jesus but he escaped from their efforts.
7. Then comes the final sign presented in the Gospel of John with the raising of a man named Lazarus from the dead. There are many facets to this story to clearly construct the theme of victory over death. John uses this story about Lazarus who is never mentioned in any of the Synoptic Gospels wherein Jesus is said to have raised others from death. When Mary and Martha are mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels there is no mention of a brother of theirs named Lazarus. Because this is the concluding story at the end of Jesus' active ministry before his death, I believe it has been presented here as a prelude to the clear victory over death in the resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus from death is the final and primary focus of the Christian Church and became the first Holy Day placed in the Liturgical Calendar.

The more one reads the Gospel of John in its intended literary form of Allegorical prose, and appreciates the spiritual nature of this Gospel, the more one learns and becomes the believer that the author hoped for in his closing remarks at the end of chapter 20. The first section, The Way, in chapters one through eleven, enables us to see that "the ways" of Jesus were truly a clear picture of "the Way" of the Realm, or Kingdom, of God for all peoples on this earth. I have underscored some things in the summary of the seven signs above for notation. There are so many words that one can use to encompass the breath and depths of God's intention and experience

for all humankind, but these words from Paul in Galatians (5:22-23), the earliest of Christian writings, may be the best summary, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law"*.

I close this section with words from Fr. Richard Rohr - [Adapted from CAC Foundation Set: Gospel Call to Compassionate Action (Bias from the Bottom) and Contemplative Prayer]

"It seems to me that it is a minority that gets the true and full gospel. We just keep worshiping Jesus and arguing over the right way to do it. The amazing thing is that Jesus never once says "worship me!" He says, "follow me" (e.g., Matthew 4:19).

Christianity is a lifestyle—a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into a clever "religion," in order to avoid the lifestyle itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain, and still believe that Jesus is their "personal Lord and Savior." The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great."

THE TRUTH:

In this section, chapters twelve through seventeen, Jesus now clearly realizes that his days are numbered and concentrates on speaking with his disciples in what are called "the farewell discourses". In the ending of chapter eleven, Caiaphas, the high priest that year said, *"If we let him go on like this the whole populace will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and sweep away our temple and our nation. You have no grasp of the situation at all; you do not realize that it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed"*. So we are told that Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews, but withdrew to Ephraim to be with his disciples.

Even though Jesus knows that the religious and political powers are plotting to put an end to his life he still makes plans to remain faithful to God as he plans to be in Jerusalem for the coming Passover. His ministry was to present the grace and freedom of God's Realm so he continues to move forward in confidence even as Mary pours expensive perfume over his feet in recognition of his being God's anointed. With his public ministry ended, Jesus proceeds into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey colt midst the mixed emotions and exclamation of a crowd that gathers as he entered the holy city. While John tells us that Jesus proclaimed: "to believe in me, is not to believe in me but in him who sent me", in response to the crowd John also says that, in spite of his many signs, they would not all believe.

As this great celebration comes to a close, Jesus gathers his disciples and reminds them, *"What the Father has said to me, therefore - that is what I speak"*. Seeing that his disciples are confused he begins by washing the feet of the disciples before they share a meal together. He impresses upon them the meaning of what he has done by saying, *"You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Then if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you."* Jesus reminds them of his great love for them and asks them to love each other in the same manner so that everyone will know that they are his disciples. When he explains that he will be with them for only a while longer, Peter asks where he is going. To this Jesus begins the series of illustrations that will help answer their concern by presenting "the truth".

- "Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me."
- "If you knew me you would know my Father too. From now on you do know him..."
- "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? I am not myself the source of the words I speak to you: it is the Father who dwells in me doing his own work."

- "In very truth I tell you, whoever has faith in me will do what I am doing; indeed he will do greater things still because I am going to the Father."
- "If you love me you will obey my commands; and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another to be your advocate, who will be with you forever - the Spirit of truth."
- "In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me: because I live, you too will live."
- "Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give."
- "If you loved me you would be glad that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I am."
- "I am the vine; you are the branches. Anyone who dwells in me, as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."
- "If you dwell in me, and my words dwell in you, ask whatever you want, and you shall have it."
- "I have spoken thus to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete."
- "I have called you friends, because I have disclosed to you everything that I heard from my Father."
- "This is my commandment to you: love one another."
- "I have told you all this to guard you against the breakdown of your faith."
- "There is much more that I could say to you, but the burden would be too great for you now. However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..."
- "In the world you will have suffering. But take heart! I have conjured the world."

After Jesus said these and other words he looked up to heaven and prayer to God, a prayer that encompasses the whole of chapter seventeen.

THE LIFE:

Jesus replied, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In very truth I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains that and nothing more; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest"*. [John 12:23-24] The main point: The time had come for Jesus to be glorified! Death was simply the prelude to his glorification!

In order for the author of the Gospel of John to share with us the phenomenal story of Resurrection Life, he had to share some of the tradition that had developed over the decades to explain his death and burial from prior Gospel accounts. The earliest Christian writing comes from the Apostle Paul's letters, but they contain very few of any incidents in the Gospels which were written decades later. The author of John only gives us two chapters - eighteen and nineteen - for his account. In real time these incidents in the closing life of Jesus probably only took about one week. I am sure that, in several of those days, some very cruel and destructive events occurred because of the temperament of those who were in authority whose treatment of their enemies were abominable. Given the record of history I would not pretend to diminish the agony and shame that Jesus bore as the insurrectionist they saw him to be.

Because of my strong belief in the New Life that is envisioned in the Resurrection of Jesus, my sense is that the Christian communities today need to emphasize the positive results of the outcome of Jesus' death rather than dwell on the process of his dying. So often Christian speak about the Good News (Gospel) and then dwell on issues that are not the point but only lead up to the point. The point here, for me, is Easter! We need to become alive as Easter people in the way we think, speak, and act. Jesus, for me, was a person who shared exclusively God's positive love and compassion for the world as he introduced and modeled the Realm of God for the whole creation, especially people who would join him in word and deed.

Perhaps we need to remember that the first Christian Holy Day was Easter - the new life in the Realm of God as portrayed by Jesus in what he said and did. The early church recognized the need to seriously consider the life and ministry of Jesus if they were to truly follow The Way, The Truth, and The Life. As in the story of Jesus

speaking with Nicodemus they realized that everyone needed to be "Born from Above" to come alive in a new Realm of being in community. Not just a quick fix of raising one's hand and going forward in a religious service to become "Born Again", but a serious time of consideration to restyle one's life according to God's intentions for our life and living with others. Eventually they devised a time of forty days before each Easter in order to learn about Jesus, his teaching and practice, to properly prepare to truly follow him. This was the time for them to accept Jesus and to become acceptable as his followers - Born from Above. During this time they would be baptized (born of water - born of the flesh) and confirmed (born from above - born of the spirit) to join in the community of believers and receive Holy Communion with the rest of the body of Christ.

Perhaps this is the simplest way to express the function of Lent in the mind of the early Christians: When Moses asked God how he could name God to Pharaoh he was told, "I AM who I Am". When Jesus wanted people to know who he was and with whom he was connected he said, "I AM who I am". When we wish to have this comprehensive identity of who we are we also need to make sure the verb TO BE is our identity "I AM who I am". As Jesus walked and talked the same lifestyle in the Kingdom or Realm of God so too must we, as followers of Jesus, make sure we walk the talk. "They will know we are Christians by our love....!"

Eventually this simple tradition fell into "traditionalism", as doctrines grew, that would refashion this period of Lent into an emphasis on "becoming" rather than "being". The comprehensive understanding of God, Jesus, and ourselves developed into sometimes rather complicated and confusing language and practice that has led to the many divisions of the Christian Church today. With the development of the doctrines of Substitutionary Atonement the emphasis switches to the death of Jesus as the focus of his mission. In brief Jesus was born to die as the sacrifice for our sins to satisfy the justice of God for our salvation. Those who are born again and accept this sacrifice for the atonement of their sins are granted a secured place in the Kingdom when this earth is destroyed and God established the New Heaven and the New Earth. Those who have this form of security have little or no need to be very concerned with this life or the planet on which we live. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...and I can't feel at home in this world anymore" as one of their hymns describes theology.

This is what happens, in many ways, when those who call themselves Christian become entangled in doctrines and traditions that are created as time goes on. The new ideas become a new tradition or view of the Gospel which I call traditionalism. When the proliferation of traditionalism caught my attention I wrote a book called "The Apparent Heresy of Jesus" because the Jesus of Scripture was more clearly a heretic now than some of the religious leaders believed in the Gospels. My book is available online if you choose to read it - <http://janddhealth.com/APHJesusBook.html>

Jesus, in the Gospel records, claimed that he came to bring us life in all its fullness and abundance in the Realm of God. There are only a few references to his words that might confuse us about an afterlife in which this fullness would be realized. He clearly insisted that the Realm of God was very present now, in his time, because he came to proclaim it and make it real in everyone's life who would become a part of this Realm. All of his signs pointed clearly to the availability of God's life-changing presence in what he said and did. Even in the words of his discourses at the end of his ministry he brings them eternal hope of this life and urges them to continue his work when he is no longer with them. He even was honest about the problems they may experience personally should they commit to a life in the Realm of God to serve instead of being served. Jesus was encouraging them to follow him even unto death so that they could become a part of the "rich harvest" envisioned in the scripture that began this section.

Resurrection! - New Life!

"No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and then wine and skins are both lost. New wine goes into fresh skins" [Mark 2:22]

Resurrection is still beyond human comprehension so try to "think out of the box". The grain of wheat has to die first and then it is changed into the fruit it was meant to be. New wine is not compatible with old wineskins and must be placed into fresh skins to live. The authors of Scripture tried their best, using their limited knowledge and language, to tell us their amazing experiences after they began to grasp what they knew about the risen Christ. With all our prowess of new 21st century knowledge and understanding of the universe we still can't begin to grasp the truth of what happens. Somehow the disciples were able to move beyond their past experience with Jesus - die - and move forward with this fresh mind blowing experience - new skins - to speak about the glorified Jesus as the Christ as they came to know it personally.

For we who are present day followers of Jesus, who have a living experience of being born from above, we also don't always have the words or expressions to convey our journey now as we have come to our personal experience with the living Christ! In this 21st century we may be closer than ever to realizing more fully the phenomenal experiences of the first century Christians even though there is no actual or technical proof about life after death. There is, however, a new dimension of awareness among scientists today that there may be cosmic interconnections being discovered that possibly shed some light on what the earlier apostle experienced and what we are sensing today about thought and consciousness. Here is a foretaste of what I am talking about that I urge you to watch:

Science Proves Thoughts Are Things

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3sLIE_iBSs&feature=youtube_gdata_player

For a long time people of many faiths, along with philosophers and scientists, have proposed, or at least considered, the probability of life after death. This concept is more openly discussed today among a broader scope of intelligent and concerned people. The following film is about 50 minutes in length, but it will certainly demonstrate what I would find hard to simply put into words alone.

Season 2, Episode 1: Is There Life After Death [Full-Length]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAQpOHBrZeU&feature=youtube_gdata_player

From a very young person, raised in a very religious Christian family, I sensed that there was something amazing about my life now and a continuing life after death for me. While I had great difficulty with the interpretation of many sincere Christian leaders in their views of scripture, I could never divorce my inner thoughts and beliefs about a larger life beyond. I have outgrown my need to fully understand God and even most current Theology is not very satisfying. I tend to be much more comfortable with what is being said in the field of Quantum Physics today and I respect those inquisitive scientists who keep an open mind to continuing their search for even deeper knowledge. As I grow older I continue to sense and become more confident that there is a marvelous transition to a life after death. I have become alive with a confident awareness in my continuing study that no longer requires absolute proof or definitions for God, nor for a complete explanation of what life will be like after my transition from this life to eternal life. Over the years my life has changed and continues to change so that I do not look back but enjoy the probabilities and possibilities for things to come. My Christian Faith [Finding Authenticity In Today's Happenings] brings me to enjoy the "traditional" blessing with which I close most of my papers:

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.

NOTE: For further information and thought I have included the following: (enjoy)

Consciousness:

Peter Russell - From Science To God - Pt 1/3

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUXhKmiJQ10&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Peter Russell - From Science To God - Pt 2/3

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L9_DxegPfU&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Peter Russell - From Science To God - Pt 3/3

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZY48YY-Yj4&feature=youtube_gdata_player