

Postcards from John, the Superabundant Gospel

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First Postcard: Four Essentials of a Christian Understanding of Reality

The Prologue of John gives four essentials for a Christian worldview and way of life today: the deepest meaning; the deepest love; Jesus who embodies both the meaning and the love; and the power to become part of his family by believing, trusting, and having faith in him, and then receiving grace upon grace upon grace.

Second Postcard: Three Core Questions

*Jesus, in the rest of John Chapter 1, gathers a learning community, a group of disciples [learners] that is centred on three questions: first, 'Who are you?'—the question of identity; second, 'What are you looking for?' [Greek *ti zēteite*—what are you searching for? What do you desire?]*—the question of desire; and third, 'Where are you staying?' [Greek *pou meneis*—where are you abiding, dwelling, living?]*—the question of where we are at home. These are questions worth asking every day.*

Third Postcard: Public Ministry—Life-giving Signs and Conversations

One distinctive element in the public ministry of Jesus is what John calls his 'signs'. Jesus says in John 10:10, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' Jesus does signs of abundant life for all—not just for those who believe in him. Another distinctive element is his deep conversations—with Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman at the well, with the man born blind, with Martha and Mary, above all with his disciples in the Farewell Discourses. These are where readers are given the wisdom for maturing in faith. We are invited to do life-giving signs for those within and beyond our own community, and to try to sound the depths of meaning and truth in conversation together.

Fourth Postcard: Farewell Discourses—Three Core Practices

Through wave after wave of teaching, Jesus forms his disciples in three core practices: learning, loving, and praying. They are practices that you can begin today, but there is no limit to your growing and maturing in them. Whoever comes to the end of learning, loving, or praying? And each of them is both a deeply personal, individual practice, and also a shared, community practice.

Fifth Postcard: Farewell Discourses—True Greatness

Jesus said, 'So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.' (13:14). He also said, soon after the foot-washing, 'Very truly I tell you, the one who believes/trusts/has faith in me will also do the works that I do, and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.' (14:12) He also said, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (15:13) Put those together and you have a radical approach to greatness through love and service. You want to be truly great? - Wash feet and be willing to lay down your life in love.

Sixth Postcard: Farewell Discourses—The Ultimate Desire of Jesus

The ultimate desire of Jesus, poured out in his prayer in John 17, is for us to be utterly united, in trust, truth, glory, and love, with him and his Father, and with each other, for the sake of the world God loves. This raises a massive question for his followers everywhere who are divided from each other: how seriously do we now take this ultimate desire of Jesus? And throughout the prayer there is repeated emphasis on the importance of keeping the word received from God through Jesus (vv. 6, 8, 14, 17, 20). What role might the Bible, the testimony to that word, have in uniting the followers of Jesus?

Seventh Postcard: The Trial—Testifying to the Truth

‘Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?”’ The response of Jesus shifts the emphasis from power to truth. ‘Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”’ (18:37-38) Jesus had been arrested by a combination of the most powerful religious leaders in his society and the representatives of the greatest political, economic and military empire the world had known up to that time. Facing them, when asked about his greatness, whether he is a king, he says his vocation is to testify to the truth. In our time, when truth in the public sphere is one of the most urgent and disturbing issues, what does it mean for us, his followers, to listen to his voice and testify to the truth?

Eighth Postcard: Crucifixion—What Happened?

Three men were crucified that day. The decisive thing about the cross of Jesus was who was on it, someone utterly one with God and utterly one with us, in complete solidarity with all creation and all humanity in love. Injustice, sin, evil, suffering, and death happened to Jesus; but Jesus happened to injustice, sin, evil, suffering, and death. They do not have the last word. The result of this unique, singular, unprecedented, once and for all happening of Jesus dying on the cross is the resurrection of Jesus, this person alive in a new way, still one with us, still one with God, and now inviting us to trust in him and to follow his unconquerable way of love, leading into the fulfilment of the desire that he poured out in his final prayer.

Ninth Postcard: The Resurrection—Sent as Jesus was Sent.

*In 20:21, before he breathes the Holy Spirit into them, Jesus says to them a second time, “**Peace be with you**”—how crucial it is that we should have the peace, as well as the knowledge of suffering (those wounds in his hands and his side) and the joy that he gives—and then gives his disciples there, and all his followers after them, their core vocation, their mission—our core vocation and mission: “**As the Father has sent me, so I send you**”. This is our essential ‘Holy Spirituality’. It has a triple thrust, sending us deeper into the relationship of Jesus with his Father, into that utter unity in love that he desires for us in his prayer in John 17; deeper into community together—note well that the ‘you’ in this is plural, it is the whole community of disciples; and deeper into the world to which Jesus was sent in love.*

Tenth Postcard: The Resurrection—A Blessing on Us Readers and Re-readers

Thomas (20:24-29) demands to see for himself instead of trusting the testimony of others. Jesus greets him and the others again with 'Peace be with you', then offers Thomas the proof he demanded. But Jesus also says: 'Do not doubt [the Greek is apistos, literally giving the translation, Do not be lacking in trust or trustworthiness] but believe [the Greek is pistos, literally meaning Be trusting, trustworthy, believing, faithful]. When he sees and believes, he cries out the climactic truth of the Gospel: My Lord and my God! But then Jesus says: Have you believed and trusted because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe/trust/have faith. We who have not seen can be blessed by believing and trusting. And how are we to trust? Of course, through trusting what John writes. John immediately goes on to address us readers: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe and trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing and trusting you may have life in his name.' (20:30-31) This is how we come to what Thomas came, crying out: My Lord and my God! And that points to the deepest secret of reading and re-reading John: we always read in the presence of Jesus, our Lord and God; these words are our way of meeting him and abiding in him—having life in his name.

Eleventh Postcard: A Fresh Start in Being Loved and in Loving

Peter has let Jesus down badly, but Jesus does not mention that. He simply gives him a completely fresh start. Jesus has already laid down his life in love for Peter and everyone else. Peter is utterly loved. Now he is addressed by Jesus by name—his birth name, 'Simon son of John', three times, going to the root of his identity. He is invited to make the love mutual: '...do you love me...? - Yes ...do you love me?... - Yes ...do you love me?... - You know that I love you ...' Not only that, Peter is given his vocation afresh, given his life's purpose and responsibility: 'Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.' And not only that, but there is, as always, a cost to love, which can be immense. He will be taken where he does not wish to go. '(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me".' To be sent as Jesus was sent is to be sent into darkness, and especially in these serious times we need to know that Jesus is our life on both sides of death, whenever and however that comes to each of us. But meanwhile we can have many fresh starts, we can be utterly fulfilled in our vocations, and we can rejoice together always in 'a love supreme'.

Ford's The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918¹

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¹ Oxford: Wiley, 2024.

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Paul Griffiths on 'religious reading':

'So far as I can recall, I have always been able to read, to make sense of and be excited by written things. I know, of course, that there was a time when I could not read; it's just that I cannot remember it. But I was never taught, and have still not properly learned, how to read with careful, slow attentiveness; it is difficult for me to read with the goal of incorporating what I read, of writing it upon the pages of my memory; I find it hard to read as a lover, to caress, lick, smell, and savour the words on the page, and to return to them ever and again. I read, instead, mostly as a consumer, someone who wants to extract what is useful or exciting or entertaining from what is read, preferably with dispatch, and then move on to something else... I'm not alone in this condition. Most academic readers are consumerist in their reading habits, and this is because they, like me, have been taught to be so and rewarded for being so. But I've also spent a good portion of my life trying to understand what it means to be a Christian, as well as much time studying literary works composed by Indian Buddhists. Both of these practices have gradually led me to see that consumerist reading isn't the only kind there is. It's also possible to read religiously, as a lover reads, with a tensile attentiveness that wishes to linger, to prolong, to savour, and has no interest at all in the quick orgasm of consumption. Reading religiously, I've come to think, is central to being religious. Losing, or never having, the ability so to read is tantamount to losing, or never having, the ability to offer a religious account of things.²

² Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading. The place of reading in the practice of religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. ix-x.

John in 90 Days³

Day 1	1.1-9	Day 31	7.10-24	Day 61	13.21-30
Day 2	1.10-13	Day 32	7. 25-31	Day 62	13.31-38
Day 3	1.14-18	Day 33	7.32-39	Day 63	14.1-7
Day 4	1.19-28	Day 34	7.40-52	Day 64	14.8-14
Day 5	1.29-34	Day 35	8.1-11	Day 65	14.15-24
Day 6	1.35-42	Day 36	8.12-20	Day 66	14.25-31
Day 7	1.43-51	Day 37	8.21-30	Day 67	15.1-6
Day 8	2.1-12	Day 38	8.31-38	Day 68	15.7-17
Day 9	2.13-23	Day 39	8.39-45	Day 69	15.18-27
Day 10	3.1-10	Day 40	8.46-59	Day 70	16.1-15
Day 11	3.11-15	Day 41	9.1-12	Day 71	16.16-24
Day 12	3.16-21	Day 42	9.13-25	Day 72	16.25-33
Day 13	3.22-36	Day 43	9.26-34	Day 73	17.1-11a
Day 14	4.1-14	Day 44	9.35-41	Day 74	17.11b-19
Day 15	4.15-26	Day 45	10.1-10	Day 75	17.20-26
Day 16	4. 27-42	Day 46	10.11-21	Day 76	18.1-14
Day 17	4.43-54	Day 47	10.22-42	Day 77	18.15-27
Day 18	5.1-18	Day 48	11.1-16	Day 78	18.28-40
Day 19	5.19-29	Day 49	11.17-27	Day 79	19.1-16a
Day 20	5.30-38	Day 50	11.28-37	Day 80	19.16b-30
Day 21	5.39-47	Day 51	11.38-44	Day 81	19.31-37
Day 22	6.1-15	Day 52	11.45-57	Day 82	19.38-42
Day 23	6.16-21	Day 53	12.1-8	Day 83	20.1-10
Day 24	6.22-27	Day 54	12. 9-19	Day 84	20.11-18
Day 25.	6.28-35	Day 55	12.20-26	Day 85	20.19-25
Day 26	6.35-40	Day 56	12.27-36a	Day 86	20.26-31
Day 27	6.41-51	Day 57	12.36b-43	Day 87	21.1-8
Day 28	6.52-59	Day 58	12.44-50	Day 88	21.9-14
Day 29	6.60-71	Day 59	13.1-11	Day 89	21.15-19
Day 30	7.1-9	Day 60	13.12-20	Day 90	21.20-25

³ Source of 'John in Ninety Days': Appendix to Alan Ecclestone, *The Scaffolding of Spirit. Reflections on the Gospel of John* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987).