



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LESSON 7 – STUDY QUESTIONS JOHN 7: 1 - 52

DAY ONE

1. What thoughts from last week’s reflection and commentary inspired you, especially in regards to the Eucharist? Record some thoughts to share with your group.

Read John 7:1-9

2a. What do you think “after this” refers to in the first sentence of verse 1? Refer to John 6:66.

b. According to the second sentence of verse 1 why does Jesus want to stay in Galilee?

3. Verse 2 speaks of the festival of Booths, also called Succoth or Tabernacles. Read the following passages and record a fact from each passage about this important festival:

Exodus 23:14

Nehemiah 8:14-18

Zechariah 14:16-18

4a. In verses 3 -5 Jesus’ “brothers” encourage him to go to the festival. List the reasons they give, contained in these verses.

b. What is revealed about Jesus’ “brothers” in the last sentence of verse 5?

c. What is Jesus’ response to his “brothers” (verse 6)?

5a. According to verse 7 why does the world hate Jesus?

b. Record Jesus' answer in verse 8. What do you think He means by this?

6.CONNECTION: In today's lesson we see the disbelief of Jesus' family. Perhaps Jesus' teachings were too hard for them to accept. Perhaps they were discouraged by the departure of many of Jesus' followers. Have you ever doubted or teased someone because of a belief or a cause, especially that of a close family member or friend, only to later regret your actions? Or perhaps you've been a recipient of ridicule for your beliefs from people close to you. Describe the situation.

Read and record John 1:11. Close in prayer asking God to give you the ability to discern truth and goodness in others, especially those closest to you.

DAY TWO

Read John 7:10-24

7a. What did Jesus do after his brothers went to the festival? (verse 10)?

b. In verse 11 we see that indeed the Jews are looking for Jesus. In verse 12 we learn that there was also much complaining about Jesus among the crowds. What are they saying?

8a. Why would no one speak openly of Jesus (verse 13)?

b. Of what do you think the people were afraid?

NOTE: As you study the Gospel of John you will see that the author often refers to the "the Jews" in a negative manner. They are frequently shown as challenging Jesus. At the time this Gospel was written many Jews were persecuting Christian Jews who still worshiped in the synagogues. For this reason the writer lumps all Jews together, portraying them in a bad light. We should never take John's negative references as a reason for bitterness or prejudice against the Jewish people.

9a. What does Jesus do during the festival (verse 14)?

b. In your own words, describe the Jews' reaction (verse 15).

c. How does Jesus respond to the Jews (verse 16)?

NOTE: In Jesus' day the temple was reserved for the educated Bible scholars, such as the Rabbis and Pharisees, to teach and preach. It was unimaginable that an uneducated son of a carpenter from Galilee could be a powerful teacher that the people flocked to hear.

10. In verses 17-18 Jesus discusses how the people could know whether or not His teaching was from God. In your own words, record His answer.

11a. Jesus reacts to the criticism of his healing of the man at the pool on the Sabbath (John 5:2-18). Briefly put Jesus' defense from verse 19 in your own words.

b. What is the crowd's answer in verse 20?

12a. In verses 21-23 how does Jesus compare what he did on the Sabbath with what the Jews do on the Sabbath? Please explain in your own words.

b. What is Jesus' final caution to the Jewish people (verse 24)?

13. CONNECTION: It was a dangerous time in Israel for Jesus and those who followed Him. There was confusion, doubt and division among the Jews. People argued whether Jesus was a good man or a deceiver. At times they were even afraid to speak about Him at all. We are told that those in authority were looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus, but they had not yet arrested him. Would you like to have been around during Jesus' lifetime? Why or why not? How would you compare the religious conditions described in Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John with that of the religious climate of our time.

Read and record Psalm 31:24. Let your trust in God lead you through tough times.

DAY THREE

Read John 7:25-31

14. According to verse 25, some of the people are surprised that although the Jewish authorities are trying to kill Jesus, they still let him teach in the temple. What do the people speculate, at the end of verse 26, as to the reason for this puzzle?

15a. Why do the people say Jesus could not be the Messiah (verse 27)?

b. According to Micah 5:2, from where is the Messiah?

NOTE: In the time of Jesus, there was a popular belief that the Messiah would just appear. Those that believed this idea were ignoring the Hebrew Scriptures that clearly predicted where the Messiah would be born.

16a. Record the two things that Jesus says the people know in the first sentence of verse 28?

b. List three statements made by Jesus in the last two sentences of verse 28.

17a. How does Jesus know “him who sent me?” in verse 29?

b. What happened next and what was the result (verse 30)?

18. Many believed in Jesus. What does their comment at the end verse 31 tell us about the rationale for their belief?

19. CONNECTION: Everywhere Jesus went he captured audiences with his teaching. He spoke truth with the authority given him by His Father. Not everything we hear is based on truth or is something we should believe. Describe a time when a teacher or speaker held you captive by their words and message. How did you determine that their message was truthful and worth listening to?

Read 1 John 4:1. Begin your prayer praising God that you are a recipient of his wisdom through the study of his word.

DAY FOUR

Read John 7: 32-36

20a. What particular groups of people are mentioned in verse 32?

NOTE: This is the first time the particular group of Jews who want to arrest Jesus, are referred to by name.

b. What do they do in the second part of verse 32 and what is the reason given? Refer back to verse 31.

21a. Jesus clearly knew that His time on earth was limited. Record three phrases from verses 33-34 that demonstrate this.

1.

2.

3.

b. What do you think Jesus is talking about in these verses?

22. The idea that Jesus was going to a spiritual and not a physical place was confusing to the crowd. What were their questions in verses 35 and 36?

23. What is the “Dispersion?” Refer to a dictionary or another source for your answer.

24. CONNECTION: In today’s verses we see that some of the Jews just don’t seem to be able to understand Jesus. Some are threatened by Him, some have closed their hearts and minds to Him and others are simply confused. Sometimes we need to struggle to appreciate what God is trying to tell us. God reveals things to us in his perfect timing, because he alone knows when we are ready to comprehend. Describe a time when you totally missed understanding God’s Word or teachings, but later after a struggle or just at the right time, thanks to God’s grace, were able to fully comprehend the beautiful message He had for you. Was this better than if you had gotten it right away? Please explain.

Read and record Psalm 18:28. Begin your prayer taking comfort that God understands our human thoughts and minds and his timing is perfect.

“Like faith itself God reveals slowly, illuminating through experience, waiting for the ripe opportunities for acceptance.” (Author unknown)

DAY FIVE

Read John 7:37-44

25a. What three beautiful statements did Jesus “cry out” in verses 37 and 38?

b. Jesus speaks of “living water” using the words of Psalm 78:16. Record the words that resemble Jesus’ statement about the living water at the end of verse 38:

NOTE: Jesus made his proclamation that He is the living water at one of the most solemn moments of the Festival of Booths. It was made on the last day during the time that the high priest poured water over the altar as prayers were said for winter rains to sustain the people in the coming season. The festival also commemorated God giving the Jews water in the desert during their 40-year sojourn, approximately 1300 years earlier.

26. In verse 39 Jesus refers to the “Spirit, Which believers in him were to receive”. Why is there no Spirit yet?

27. After hearing Jesus’ words, who do the people say He is in verses 40-41?

28. According to verses 43 and 44, how and why is the crowd divided?

29a. What did some of the crowd want to do (verse 44)?

b. Today’s passage ends with the phrase, “but no one laid hands on him”. Explain why you think they didn’t follow act on their desires.

30. CONNECTION: Water is so plentiful for us that we take it for granted. It’s no wonder that the Jews, a desert people, would hold a great festival to honor God’s past blessings of water and pray for

continued abundance. At the Festival of Tabernacles, in John 7:38, Jesus cried out that from the heart of every believer living water pours forth into the world. Recall a time when you were physically parched and badly in need of water. Now recall a time when you were spiritually parched and Jesus was like quenching water to your soul. Write some details to share with your group. At Baptism we are immersed in this living water. Imagine living water pouring out from your heart to a world spiritually parched for God's love and compassion. As a believer in Jesus Christ do you have this living water and do you share it with those in need? Write some details to share with your group.

Reread John 4:14-15 remembering as you close in prayer that Jesus is our oasis in the desert and we need never be thirsty again.

DAY SIX

Read John 7:45-52

31a. When the temple police reported back to the chief priests and Pharisees, they asked, "Why did you not arrest him?" What reason was given in verse 46?

b. On the surface this doesn't seem to answer the question. What do you think they were really saying?

32a. What response do the Pharisees make in verse 48?

In verses 47-49 what attitude do the Pharisees show toward the police as well as the crowd?

NOTE: "The...Pharisees...are the spiritual fathers of modern Judaism. Their main distinguishing characteristic was a belief in an Oral Law that God gave to Moses at Sinai along with the Torah. The Torah or Written Law was akin to the U.S. Constitution in the sense that it set down a series of laws that were open to interpretation. The Pharisees believed that God also gave Moses the knowledge of what these laws meant and how they should be applied. This oral tradition was codified and written down roughly three centuries later in what is known as the Talmud."

The Pharisees also maintained that an afterlife existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in the world to come. They also believed in a messiah who would herald an era of world peace."

("Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes" by Mitchell G. Bard, The Virtual Jewish Library)

33a. Who is Nicodemus and what question does he pose to the Pharisees in verses 50-51?

b. Compare Nicodemus' attitude in this situation with his attitude when he went to visit Jesus in John 3:1-2.

34a. How do the Pharisees reply to Nicodemus in verse 52?

b. Do you consider this remark to be an insult? Why or why not?

NOTE: The religious authorities and civil authorities of Jerusalem regarded Galileans with suspicion. They were widely regarded as yokels who spoke Aramaic, the language of the common man, rather than Greek, which was spoken by the upper class and the educated. They were also believed to be poorly educated in the Mosaic law, and lax in its observance.

35. CONNECTION: We have seen in Chapter 7 that one reason the Pharisees did not take Jesus seriously and judged him adversely was because he was from Galilee, from a social class of people that were poor and uneducated, often referred to as "People of the Land." Today we might hear the term "hick" or "hillbilly" to describe similar groups. It was unfathomable to the Pharisees that anyone worth listening to would be from Galilee. Are you quick to stereotype people? Or are you open to appreciate those different from you in background? Describe a time when you developed a friendship with someone from a different culture or economic status. How was your life enriched by this relationship?

Read Romans 2:11 letting this thought lead you into prayer



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LESSON 7– COMMENTARY
BY FATHER ALFRED MCBRIDE, O. PRAEM
JOHN 7: 1 - 52

Thirsty Ones! Come to the Water!

Farmers love good harvests. They also love water, especially when they happen to live in desert climates. Agricultural festivals centered on harvests and rain, are as old as history itself. The genius of Judaism—which Christianity would also evidence—was taking such nature feasts and making them religious festivals as well.

The feast of Tabernacles celebrated the autumn harvest and the hope for winter rain to help along the spring growing period. It also honored the memory of Israel's forty year pilgrimage in the desert after the Red Sea Crossing. As the farmers engaged in rain making rituals, the priest carried a golden bowl of water from the pool of Siloam to the temple where he poured it on the altar. The priest prayed for rain, but also implored God for an outpouring of the divine spirit of compassion. Rain for the earth. A divine spirit for the human heart.

There was a playful quality about this feast. Families built tents made out of branches and leaves and camped out for the eight days of the feast. This recalled the "tent days" of their ancestors in the desert. They looked back with nostalgia on the simplicity of life and religion in those olden times. In those nomadic days, people carried the ark of God (also called the ark of the Covenant) with them, and felt like free spirits in their never ending journey.

Their faith seemed more dynamic because their lives were more adventurous. Not being domesticated themselves, they envisioned God as equally unencumbered by the confinements of settled life. Seen through the window of history, those mighty ancestors traveled like pioneers of the spirit, exciting, romantic, daring, rugged, and heroic. They lived in the age of the giants of religion. When they chose a campsite, they pitched tents for themselves. And they made a tent—or tabernacle—for God's ark in the middle of the encampment. At times, God even "walked" with them when he appeared as a pillar of cloud in the daytime and a pillar of fire at night.

Their descendants in Christ's time hoped to recapture some of that religious dynamism in their eight day festivities of camping out in their leafy tents, singing songs, praising God, eating heartily, telling stories, marching in religious processions, playing games, and catching up on what had happened to their friends and relatives in the past year.

Tabernacles was the most cheerful of all Jewish feasts. Not the most important. That was Passover. Tabernacles was for them what Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July are for Americans, a mixture

of patriotism, religion, and heartfelt gratitude for the bounty of the earth. This was not a churchy feast, but more of a family festival where faith had a light hearted tone.

Jesus Goes to the Feast (John 7:1-13)

It should be evident to the reader by now that John liked to arrange his gospel narrative about Jesus around the religious feasts of the Jewish calendar. Passover. Jewish Pentecost. Tabernacles. These feasts dealt directly with God's action in history. John's gospel did no less, for he clearly showed how Jesus, the Word become flesh, was reshaping history. And what better place was there to underscore this truth than at a liturgical festival?

One vivid connection between Jesus and Tabernacles was the tents. Thousands of people pitched their branch tents in the available spaces in Jerusalem (sometimes on rooftops) and outside its walls. Remarkably, the Word of God had come to earth and "pitched his tent among us." With a heady mix of nostalgia and history, blurred by distance, and romanticized by memory, the celebrants encountered in Jesus a new and unexpected realization of the ancient event of tenting in the wilderness. God the Father had walked with their ancestors. God the Son walked with them now, not as a mysterious cloud and fire, but as a visible person and friend. Love had found a way to be present to them in a manner totally unforeseen.

On the eve of the feast, Jesus and his disciples were doing mission work in Galilee. Jesus had stayed away from Judea because the religious leaders had obtained warrants for his arrest and made no secret of their plans to have him killed. They wanted to be rid of this troublesome preacher and wonder worker. The disciples did not realize the seriousness of the situation. Even if popular support for Jesus had waned in Galilee after the Bread of Life discourse, there was still a feeling that Jesus enjoyed considerable acceptance in the mountain villages and the fishing towns along the lakeshore.

Lulled by the pleasant Galilean mission, they did not quite comprehend the depth of hostility Jesus had caused among the powers that be in the south, the bureaucratic center of their religion. Authorities never like having situations and people they cannot control. This is how Jesus seemed to them. His ministry not only disturbed their standard approach to religion, but also was fraught with political dangers. He might upset the uneasy compromises they made with the Roman rulers. A threat to the social and religious order of things must be removed, violently if necessary.

The disciples wanted to be in Jerusalem for all the excitement and enjoyment of Tabernacles. They knew Jesus was reluctant to go. They tried to persuade him by arguing that he needed to let the broader world see how powerful his message was and how wondrous were his works. Jesus knew they still did not grasp the essence of his mission. "His brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5).

He resorted to plain and unsentimental language to instruct them. They did not appreciate the hatred he was attracting from the power of evil in the world. They did not yet experience such hostility because they had not begun to confront the evil that must be identified and fought against. He told them they simply had not yet realized the issue at hand, the conquest of evil and the hatred for those who would battle against it.

Jesus encouraged them to go and enjoy themselves at the feast. His “hour” had not yet come. The real “hour” would be the passion. Here Jesus seems to refer more to the opportunity for effective mission, because in fact he did leave for the feast soon after his disciples had departed. Jesus arrived at Tabernacles in the middle of the festivities when the receptivity to faith in his message would be greater. He was not worried about his safety. He was more concerned about the spiritual health of his beloved people and wanted to open them as much as he could to receiving his offer of salvation.

Send the Temple Police to Arrest Jesus (John 7:14-36)

Jesus arrived in a Jerusalem that was enjoying itself to the full. Tabernacles was at midpoint. The cumulative celebrating had generated a genial atmosphere in which the sacred and the secular purposes had blended to cause a widespread companionable spirit. Jesus proceeded to give some widely admired Scripture lessons. Trained rabbis were astonished that he could be so good at it, considering he had not taken any formal studies in the Bible. Such training consisted in becoming a student of a recognized rabbi, where one studied the opinions of famous rabbis of the past about the texts of Scripture. “How does he know Scripture without having studied?” (John 7:15).

The easy mood of the moment made Christ’s reply more persuasive. He told them he was trained by a very well known teacher—his heavenly Father. He had attended the best and most prestigious of all rabbinical schools, the classroom of God. Jesus explained that the effectiveness of his Scripture teaching proceeded from a life of obedience to his Father’s will and the intention of seeking only God’s glory, not one’s own. This comment about glory is “presence talk.” To seek God’s glory is not to conduct religious and musical fireworks to tickle a divine ego. Rather it means to open a window and let God’s loving presence be felt.

Thus mastery of Scripture is more than studying texts and famous opinions about them. That is indeed important. But without a life of obedience to God’s will and a commitment to unfold his glory presence to the world, the core meaning of Scripture will never be really known. In the last analysis, Bible study is an act of faith.

Suddenly, Jesus broke the pleasant spell of Tabernacles and the mild jousting between himself and his questioners. It was as though a threatening cloud had darkened those sunny moments. Jesus took the initiative and swept away pretenses. “Why are you trying to kill me?” (John 7:19). He questioned those religious bureaucrats about their lethal conspiracy. At another level he was putting the Prince of Darkness on notice. It was evil itself which was out to destroy him, for “The Prince” knew that Jesus was determined to remove evil’s control over the human heart, not just in these religious leaders but in every person who was subject to evil and sin.

Jesus had shattered the “feel good” mood of Tabernacles. Unaware of the reality of evil’s intent against Christ and not informed about the plots of the religious leaders, the people roared out that Jesus was crazy. Who would want to kill him? Their outcry came as much from being irritated at Jesus for raining on their parade as from a genuine disbelief that anyone would even dream of killing him. Jesus then spoke of the murderous reaction to his healing on the Sabbath, something

most pilgrims would have known little about.

The discussion turned to the subject of Christ's origins. People were aware that Jesus was being called the messiah by some. They said he could not be the messiah because they knew he came from Nazareth. Such a statement was based on the theory of the "hidden messiah," which claimed that no one could know the origin or birthplace of the messiah. He would appear "out of the blue." That is why some thought Elijah would come again to identify the messiah and anoint him. Another instance of the hidden messiah theory occurred at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter had confessed that Jesus was the messiah. Jesus praised Peter for discovering what had been "hidden" from the eyes of all.

Jesus told them they may know his earthly birthplace, but they did not know about his heavenly origin. They were missing the truth about him both as messiah (their hidden messiah theory stopped that) and as Son of God.

Aware of his double claim to messiahship and divinity, the religious leaders sent temple police to arrest him. This is the first of two arrest scenes in the gospels, the other being at Gethsemane. In both cases the officers had no ability to touch him until he gave permission—which happened when his "hour" came. The attempts on his life led him to think about his death and his return to his Father after the resurrection

Wave the Myrtle Branches and Lemons (John 7:37-52)

Practically speaking, the most important aspect of Tabernacles was rain. Ardent prayers for rain were chanted. If rain fell during the feast, it was considered a good omen predicting that more rain will come, much needed for the fertile crops of the following year.

Every morning during the feast a rain procession was held. The pilgrims marched to the spring of Gihon at the foot of temple Mount. This spring supplied the water for the pool of Siloam, a kind of ancient reservoir. The priest filled a golden bowl with water and the people sang, "With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). The people returned to the temple, marching through the Water Gate.

The pilgrims carried myrtle and willow branches tied with palm in their right hands. These symbolized their tents. They carried lemons in their left hands, symbolizing the harvest. Gathered around the altar of holocausts in front of the temple building, they sang various psalms, waved the branches and lemons and swayed to the rhythms of the music. The priest ascended the steps to the altar and poured out the water onto the altar. The gesture imitated the falling of rain, "reminding" God to send real rain.

Amid the drama and color of this rain parade, the music, the gleaming gold of the water bowl, the lemons and myrtle branches—perhaps even an actual autumnal rainfall—Jesus stood up and said, "Let anyone who thirsts, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38).

The people had prayed for water. Jesus proclaimed their prayers had been answered. He was the real response to their hopes. Tabernacles always meant more than rain. It also contained within itself the hope for a messiah. Zechariah had predicted that living waters would flow from Jerusalem. Jesus announced the living waters were now here. Ezekiel had seen a vision in which a river flowed from a rock underneath the temple. Jesus told his listeners that he was the temple. A river of living water will flow from him. Moses had struck a rock in the desert and water flowed from it. On Calvary a soldier lanced the side of Jesus and water flowed from it.

What is this water? It is both the saving water of baptism and the image of the Spirit whom Jesus would send. There was a long and honored tradition in Scripture which connected water images with the pouring out of the Spirit. Ezekiel linked the sprinkling of water to the outpouring of divine spirit. Jesus had spoken of creating a new person out of water and the Spirit. This is sacramental talk. Earthly water. Divine Spirit. Creation and Creator joined together for a saving purpose.

In this passage we have a third example from John's gospel in which a material element is given strong prominence. At Cana, Jesus produced gallons of wine. On a Galilean mountain, Jesus created barrels of bread. At Tabernacles, Jesus performed no water miracle, but drew a powerful Gospel message from a rain ceremony where water was on everyone's mind. Bread and Wine would have sacramental significance in the Eucharist. The Water acquired sacramental meaning in baptism.

Admittedly, water imagery is prominent in the Baptist's preaching about baptism and in Christ's dialogue with Nicodemus about spiritual transformation. It is true that water was a central image in the conversion of the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well, and it was the backdrop of the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. But it is only at Tabernacles that water's vivid imagery and symbolism obtains the fullest force.

One many argue that it was the artistry of John's sure pen that created an incremental portrait of the imagery of water at the service of Christ's preaching and saving ministry. The gradual buildup from the Baptist to Nicodemus to the Samaritan Woman to the Pool of Bethesda to Tabernacles is like the swell of a symphony surging to an emotional climax amid the myrtle branches and lemons and music and a golden bowl—and yes, water. And above all, there is Jesus, from whom will flow water and the Spirit to wash us joyously in love forever.

McBride, Alfred, O. Praem. Chapter 7: Thirsty Ones! Come to the Water! In: *Meditation and Commentary on the Gospel of John, The Divine Presence of Jesus*, Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1992, pp. 69 – 76. Commentary reprinted by The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study with permission of publisher. All Rights Reserved. Scripture text from The New American Bible with Revised New Testament, ©1986 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. All rights reserved.