



*Back Home Sunday  
September 9, 2012  
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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church*

*Did You Get the Word?  
That You May Believe  
John 20:30-31*

Welcome Home, Chapel Hill! I hope you had a great summer! And for those who are visiting this morning, a particularly warm “Welcome” to you! We would love to become your church home. But whether you are a newbie or a long-timer, I certainly hope you receive a warmer welcome than I did two Sundays ago, just back from vacation. I went out after church to discover my car window had been broken and my registration and garage door opener had been stolen. And a while later I got a call from Cyndi saying that someone had gone to our home used the opener to break into our garage. He stole my beautiful, red air compressor! I loved that air compressor, so I’m not happy! And if I see someone walking around with a red air compressor... you may be reading about me in the newspaper!

As we begin our new year, we are in for a real treat, because we are about to start a journey through one of the most important books in the Bible. To get started, let’s do a little quiz... just to see how sharp you stayed over the summer.

This is called a Bible. The last third of our Bible, the part that tells the story about Jesus and his Church, is called The New Testament. The first books of the New Testament which tell us about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are called the gospels. How many gospels are there? Four. And they are essentially the same, right? No! The first three—Matthew, Mark and Luke—are similar. They are called the “Synoptics,” from a Greek word that means “to lay them next to each other and look at them together.” The Synoptics have their differences, but when you look at Matthew, Mark and Luke, they fit together.

And then you turn to that fourth gospel—what is its name? John. And it is very different! You might say, “How different is it, Pastor Mark?” Well I’ll tell you! Let’s start with what it doesn’t have compared to the Synoptics. Ready? John has no Christmas story, no baptism story, no temptation story, no Communion, no ascension and (are you ready?) no exorcisms! Not one! Surprised?

Here’s an even more surprising omission. When you think about the teaching of Jesus, what comes to mind? Parables, right? The Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son. When we turn to John’s gospel, how many parables do we find? 10? 5? Zippo. Zilch! Not one parable.

So, John's gospel is very different because of what it omits. It is also different because of what it includes. John tells us stories that we find nowhere else in the Bible: the changing of water into wine at Cana, the conversation with Nicodemus (remember that one? "For God so loved the world..." only in John.) The woman at the well, the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, the adulterous woman, the washing of the disciples' feet... only in John. And there is another story, Jesus' most spectacular miracle. Do you remember? The raising of Lazarus from the dead. Only in John!

John was the only apostle who did not die a martyr's death. He lived to be an old man and wrote his gospel around 85-95 A.D. The Synoptics had already been circulating for many years. John read them. And decided to write a different kind of gospel. It's almost like he was saying, "I can't believe you guys didn't include the wedding at Cana or Nicodemus. I can't believe you didn't include the raising of Lazarus from the dead. So while I'm still alive, I am going to write my own gospel. I'm going to include things you left out and I'm going to write it with a specific purpose in mind."

What was that purpose? Anyone here ever gotten so excited about a book that turned to the back to see how it ended? Well, we are going to turn to the back of this book to see why it started... because John tells us his purpose for writing his unique gospel. John 20:

<sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

There is a lot packed into these two little verses. Let's unpack them. First, John admits that there were many other miracles that he could have included. But he says, "I picked just a few of them to make my point." Seven, actually. John highlights seven miracles out of all the remarkable things Jesus did. How would you like that editing job? To decide, out of all of Jesus' miracles, which seven would accomplish his purpose?

And what was that purpose? <sup>31</sup>"...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Why did John write his book? That we might believe! Actually, the Greek word means, "That you might be believers." ...continuous action. Some people think that you receive Jesus as your Lord once, and it's done. Then you just go about living any old way you want to but at least you've got your eternal fire insurance. That's not enough, John says. I have written this that you might be believers...

every day, every hour, every situation. You will be such a believer that no one would be surprised to discover that you were a Christian.

“Be believers....” But believe what? That Jesus is God in the flesh sent by the Father to save the world. John wants us to believe that, and why: to fill our heads with important information? No, so that we may have life! That’s one of John’s favorite words. We will hear it a lot. “In His name” means “by having an intimate relationship with.” So John tells us that he has written these words so that we might believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, have an intimate relationship with him, and experience life. Real life! You have just heard John’s description of our mission!

I spoke with someone a few weeks back who said, “I feel like I’m just phoning it in regarding my Christianity. I don’t feel excited. I don’t feel inspired... just going through the motions.” Anyone here ever felt that way about their Christian walk? Just going through the motions? Would John be satisfied with that? No! What does he want us to experience? Life... real life! Read these words; meditate on these carefully chosen words, John says, and it will lead you to real life. Is there anyone here this morning who could use a shot of real life? Doesn’t life sound good? Then dig in!!

That’s the “what” of John’s gospel. Who’s the “who?” Verse 31: “...these are written that you may believe...” Do you see that little word “you.” That is not a good translation... because we don’t have an English equivalent. That “you” is second person plural. King James has a word for it: “Ye.” Southerners have a word for it: “Y’all.” Or if it’s a big crowd: “All y’all.”

Anyone here ever had a book dedicated to them? I know my mom has... because I did it. I dedicated my thesis to her. Well this book, John’s gospel, is dedicated to all y’all! He did not write it primarily for the disciples of his time. John looked out 2000 years, and wrote his gospel with all y’all in mind—all of us who didn’t have a chance to meet Jesus in the flesh. It is John’s gift given to all y’all so that you might keep on believing that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh come to save the world, and that having a relationship with Him is the only way to real life.

I told you there was a lot packed into these two verses. Do you have room for one more tidbit? By the time you are done reading these verses, what are the next two words you expect to read? “Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” What are the next two words you would expect to read? “The End,” right?

Doesn’t that sound like the end to the book? Well it was, originally. When John first wrote his gospel, when he reached the end of chapter 20, he thought he was done. The book was finished. But the Holy Spirit had other ideas. The Holy Spirit

said, "No, I want to tell the story of Peter's reconciliation with Jesus. Remember? "Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep?" That wasn't part of the original gospel, but the Holy Spirit added one last story... one more chapter to be written.

Guess what? The Holy Spirit is still not done writing the story of His Church. And He is definitely not done writing the story of this church. Chapel Hill is living through a time of incredible mixed emotions, aren't we? On one hand, we are saying goodbye to Pastor Jeremy and his family. Jeremy is one of the best and dearest colleagues I have ever worked with. I am going to miss him; we all will. But even as God was stirring the Vaccaro hearts to move to Fresno, God was also stirring the hearts of others to come and join us. There is another exciting chapter to be written at Chapel Hill, and I'd like you to meet the folks who are going to help us write it. You have met Kevin Williams, our new Minister of Discipleship and Mission. Now, just arrived from their cross-country move as of last night, I want you to meet our new Assistant Pastors, Larry and Megan Hackman. Would you welcome these new members of our pastoral team to Chapel Hill?

To the Hackmans: Welcome, Megan and Larry! You are not only fresh off of a cross-country move, you are fresh out of seminary, aren't you? When our search team met you, it was pretty much love at first sight. But these are new waters for us. As soon as you guys finish your exams, you will be ordained as our first clergy couple, sharing one full time position. And Megan, you will be our first woman pastor... new and exciting stuff for us. But it's pretty new and exciting for you, isn't it? How did God call you here to be a part of our next chapter?

Larry: Well Pastor Mark, that story really began a while ago. Even before we began seminary Megan and I have always had some sense that we would be doing ministry together somehow, as a team with God using our unique sensibilities and gifts. As we went through seminary God sharpened our sense of call so that we knew that he was calling us to work in the local church, and as it happened, the local church in the EPC. As May came around and we graduated, we began to realize more and more how unusual our calling was. When we looked at the EPC website and talked with pastors, we never heard of a position posted for a female pastor, much less for a clergy couple. We had a trusted professor telling us that maybe we should consider pursuing a Ph.D. and work in the academic world instead. So getting a Ph.D. would have been easier, apparently! Well, we knew that God really had called us in this unique way, so we kept looking. We had been at General Assembly last year, so we knew it was a great opportunity to meet other pastors, and even if we didn't know of any jobs available for us, maybe it would be a good opportunity to talk about what ministry is like with other pastors.

Megan: So I emailed churches where we have friends and family in hopes of connecting with EPC churches we could be in ongoing relationship with. Chapel Hill was one of those places! We didn't know you were looking to hire

someone, and you didn't tell us, but it came as one outrageously lavish answer to our prayers just to meet you—a church that is passionate about Jesus Christ, with incredibly fun and deep pastors and elders, who were all at once excited about their home church, their relationship with one another, missions, and even talking with us about what a couple in pastoral ministry might look like. We left so hopeful about working in the church and affirmed that God was indeed calling us to the local church.

Larry: It was quite a shock for us to find out that Chapel Hill was calling a pastor, but as we talked with you, Jeremy, and Jim & Kim over those three days at GA it was quickly apparent that there was something special about Chapel Hill and that maybe, just maybe, we could serve God with our gifts in this place. That's not a maybe any more, and we've been bowled over by how God has confirmed for everyone involved that he has brought us here.

To Kevin Williams: Kevin! You are a Southern Baptist pastor who is working as a missionary coach in Georgia! How did you and Sarah and Chloe and Eli come to believe that the Holy Spirit wants you to be a part of the next chapter here at Chapel Hill?

Answer: (Not available in print.)

I know the congregation is eager to get to know our newbies. You can do just that in our Ministry Fair down in the gym following this service. Make your way down, shake their hands, don't hog them—there are lots of folks who want to meet them—but give them that great Chapel Hill welcome. And while you're at it, take a look at all of the other things that God is doing as He begins to write the next chapter of our life together.

As you leave this morning, this is the question I hope will gnaw away at your soul: "What part am I playing in this new chapter of our church?" Are you going to be a spectator, a consumer, a pew potato, or will you be one of the scribes that God uses to write his story of real life in Jesus upon the hearts of this needy world? "...these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Do you remember the name for the first 3 gospels? How does John differ from them? Why does John differ?

2. John tells us his purpose for writing his gospel in 20: 30-31. What is it? What is the difference between "you may become believers" and "you may be believers?" which is the best translation of this verse?

3. Do you remember what is significant about the word "you" in verse 31? John promises that "all y'all" will have life in "His name." What kind of life is he talking about? Honestly, are you experiencing that kind of life? Why or why not?