SEASONS: A Journey through the Gospel of John
22nd July - 23rd September 2012

But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

John 20:31

Colin McCahon (1919-1987) is widely recognised as New Zealand’s foremost painter. With a career spanning 45 years his work encompassed many themes, subjects and styles, from landscape to figuration to abstraction and an innovative use of painted text. His adaption of aspects of modernist painting to a specific local situation and his intense engagement with spiritual matters mark him out as a distinctive figure in twentieth-century art. Whilst never overtly calling himself a Christian, McCahon’s deep spirituality is reflected in his numerous paintings that reflect on the ‘I Am’, Jesus, and in particular the inspiration of the Gospel of John. This reader will include the art of Colin McCahon as a prompt to help us engage further with our reflections of how we see the I Am, the Light of the World, Jesus.
Welcome!

The Gospel of John has a rich history of being highly influential in people’s understanding of Jesus. There is perhaps more written about this gospel than any of the others. There are many reasons for this, but essentially, its powerful! We hope that over the next 10 weeks you’ll find yourself wanting to immerse yourself in another journey of transformation. Already this year we’ve focussed on spiritual practices that help us grow and be stretched, and we’ve just finished a couple of months of being refilled with knowledge and experience of God with us by the Holy Spirit. This term we continue our journey by going deeper into the person of Jesus, who is the only constant in a world of change.

Our hope is that this reader will prompt you with some readings and thoughts leading up Sundays. But as well as speaking through the listed themes on Sundays, further resources can be found at www.pressingon.org.nz as our series are intended to be 24/7, not just one day per week. That’s why we provide personal, small group and family resources that guide you Monday - Saturday. Sundays are just an hour or two, but our faith journey is one that encompasses all of our week, at work, at school, on the sports field, at dancing class, in the gym, or wherever we find ourselves.

September will also be a big month - Random Acts of Kindness month. This is an opportunity to show people from Devonport up to the Hibiscus Coast that what we talk about in church really makes a difference in our lives, and for our world. Its going to be great!

So welcome to Seasons: A Journey Through the Gospel of John. We hope you enjoy it!

Grant Harris   Tony Versey    Nick Burtenshaw
Senior Pastor   Senior Pastor    Pastor

Week 1: Introduction

From cover to cover the Bible declares the reality of the seasons of life. We all experience ups and downs, joys and sorrows, triumphs and challenges. No matter our age, our lives provide countless ongoing opportunities to keep growing in our understanding of who God is and who we are as children of God. As we’ll see through the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks into all these situations and constantly reminds us of His unchanging and unfailing love for us. John is often called the ‘beloved disciple’ because of his demonstrated intimacy with Jesus, his desire to continually learn who Jesus was and to experience the fullness of life that Jesus said He came to offer.

Twenty three times in the Gospel of John we see Jesus saying that He is ‘I am’, mostly followed by a statement such as ‘I am the Messiah’ (John 4:26 New Living Translation), ‘I am the Bread of Life’ (John 6:35 New International Version), ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ (John 14:6NIV). These statements are significant and impacting in the way we see and understand Jesus. Ultimately, a more in-depth relationship with Jesus changes the way we live and the way we see our world. The challenge through this series is not only to understand more of Jesus, but to experience more of His life in ours. This means it’s not only head knowledge, but heart experience that translates into life change others around us can see, thus ‘by our fruit may we be known’ (Matthew 7:16, 20).

Colin McCahon: A Fall of Light Illuminating Darkness (1971)
Week 2: Enlightenment

Autumn is a season of shedding, of letting go. Sometimes in life we need to shed our preconceived ideas about many things. In the first two weeks of this series we want to look at the person of Jesus; so let’s be prepared to let go of some of our preconceived ideas about Jesus and look freshly at what John writes about who Jesus really is.

Reading: John 1:1-18

In these beginning verses, John introduces some significant themes that will develop through the rest of the book. Leslie Newbigin says, ‘like the overture to an opera [these verses] announce in brief form the great themes which will be developed as the story unfolds.’ These themes include: Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, the nature of the world, and the hope of our transformation as children of God. These themes will remain consistently important throughout this series and the conclusions we reach in this introduction affect our reading of the gospel as a whole.

Your thoughts / notes:

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Colin McCahon: He Was Not Himself The Light (1969)
Utilising John 1:6-8

Week 3: Not Religion

Autumn is a season of shedding, of letting go. Sometimes in life we need to shed our preconceived ideas about many things. In the first two weeks of this series we want to look at the person of Jesus; so let’s be prepared to let go of some of our preconceived ideas about Jesus and look freshly at what John writes about who Jesus really is.

Reading: John 2:1-3:15

Religion is no longer needed to get to Jesus. Faith and life in Christ has replaced the keeping of the law as the primary point of reference. It’s not about rules and regulation; it’s about relationship with Him. Jesus demonstrates the shortcomings of Judaism’s religious forms through the miracle at Cana, clearing the temple and talking to Nicodemus about being born again. Let’s think about the forms of religion that we hold to today that are no longer relevant and that are in fact barriers to a renewed life in Christ.

Your thoughts / notes:

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Colin McCahon: Gate III (1970)
Week 4: Belief

Winter seasons are often described as barren months; things don’t seem to go the way we want and we don’t always see what we want to see; it can sometimes seem like it’s always raining. But while life can sometimes seem stationary, the world is still turning, and Jesus is still at work.

Reading: John 3:16-4:54

The first step in experiencing the type of life that Jesus offers us is belief in who He is as the Son of God and God himself. Belief is about being transformed and is demonstrated in these passages through the story of the women at the well (living water) and the healing of the official’s son (the granting of physical life that leads to belief). Belief will hold us through the tough seasons, when we don’t necessarily see tangible things. Signs act to strengthen the faith of those who already believe, as evidenced by the royal official who believed before he saw the sign.

In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer
...Albert Camus

The text is John 11:21-44, slightly abridged, from the New English Bible

Week 5: Life

Winter seasons are often described as barren months; things don’t seem to go the way we want and we don’t always see what we want to see; it can sometimes seem like it’s always raining. But while life can sometimes seem stationary, the world is still turning, and Jesus is still at work.

Reading: John 5:16 - 6:59

Recognition of who Jesus is by faith is a difficult thing to achieve, particularly when opposition would want us to believe that He is not who He says He is. John is at pains to emphasise that Jesus gives life to all who believe in Him. Jesus describes himself as the Bread of Life, able to sustain life in this world and for eternity. The life that Jesus offers is demonstrated through the healing of the lame man and the feeding of the 5,000.

Colin McCahon: I Know That Whatever You Ask Of God (1969)
The text, with slight modifications, is John 11:22, 29 and 32.
Spring is the season of new growth; turning the corner from darkness to life. Jesus is the person who brings light and life to the darkness. The result of new growth is extraordinary, just as Jesus is extraordinary. Want to experience some extraordinary new growth? Then believe in the One who describes himself as the ‘I am.’

Reading: John 8:31-9:41

Since the serpent’s lie in Genesis 3:4 that God is not to be believed, the world has been enslaved to darkness. In these passages we see the Jews rejection of Jesus’ message – they miss out on life in Jesus because they don’t see him as the light in the midst of darkness. Jesus’ healing of a blind man highlights the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. In what ways does the darkness of the world impact our lives and prevent us from believing (seeing the light)?

Colin McCahon: Crucifixion - The Apple Branch (1950)

Reading: John 13:31-16:33

This passage begins what we call Jesus’ farewell discourse. Jesus is on his way to the Father (home). Like Jesus, his followers are not only strangers in a world that do not know him, they are not even accepted by the world. The time to come is our ‘home’ in the presence of God, but we discover a sense of being ‘home’ in the present with the gift of His Spirit living in us. This is what we call the ‘now and not yet’ which is something that helps us gain healthy perspective on our lives today and yet amazing hope for the life to come.

Colin McCahon: I Am (1954)
Week 8: Death

In summer we experience warmth and comfort; the summer months are where the effects of pain are overcome and new life is enjoyed. The hope of summer is worth the effort of waiting for.

Reading: John 18:1-19:42

This is the great Passion Narrative - covering Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, trial, sentence, crucifixion and burial. While we see in this passage that Jesus experienced persecution and death, the result of these events laid the foundation for new life like had never been experienced. There is some correlation for us when the suffering we experience in life (both generally and because of our faith) helps the process of dying to sin as it refines, frees and perfects us. The new life that flows from pain changes us forever.

What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness.

...John Steinbeck
Travels with Charley: In Search of America


Week 9: Resurrection

In summer we experience warmth and comfort; the summer months are where the effects of pain are overcome and new life is enjoyed. The hope of summer is worth the effort of waiting for.

Reading: John 20:1-21:25

In the conclusion to the Passion Narrative, Jesus has overcome the power of sin and death and demonstrates this by appearing to his disciples three times. As a result of this appearing and living testimony, the disciples went into the world taking the Good News with them. The summer season is about sharing and growing with one another; may this Gospel story be the foundation of our relationships, both now and into the future.

Colin McCahon: He Calls for Elias (1959)
We want to help you continue your journey through the gospel of John beyond Sunday’s, so we’ve put together a range of different opportunities that help you connect with others to explore the Gospel of John further in the season you’re currently in:

‘Carey North’: Two lecturers from Carey Baptist College will come to Windsor Park for 3 consecutive Thursday evenings to lead a more focused study on the following topics:

9th August 2012 @ 7.30pm: ‘Jesus: Word, Water, Temple’ (with Sarah Harris)

This session will begin our journey into John’s story of Jesus as we look at John 1-2. We will spend most of our time thinking about Jesus as the Word in the prologue (1:1-18), the way He redefines ritual purification in the story of the Wedding at Cana (2:1-11) and how Jesus’ body is the temple (2:13-25). John’s Gospel is in the genre of ancient biography in which a writer orders and shapes (true) stories to show the significance of an individual. Writers, even Gospel writers, make choices as to how they will tell someone’s story. So what were the events John chose to highlight? Where did John begin his biography? And of course, what does this tell us about who Jesus is and then how does this help us today? To provide a framework for this we will also brainstorm the events and stories that John records and the way this varies and complements the Synoptic Gospels. Sarah’s hope and prayer is that this inspires and equips you to read all of John’s Gospel and you take that learning into your homes, workplaces and communities.

16th August 2012 @ 7.30pm: ‘Why John thought Jesus had to die’ (with Sarah Harris)

John’s Gospel is the last of the four Gospel’s to be written. It was likely written after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, a time when Christians were trying to understand their roots in Judaism and also how Jesus redefined Jewish practice. These factors have greatly influenced John’s passion story. While the Gospel is consistent with the basic historical truths of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is full of detail that enriches and explains why Jesus had to die. For John there is no last supper account, there is no prayer in the garden, no cry of forsakeness from the cross, yet he tells us of Jesus’ care for Mary, the piercing of his side and emphasises Jesus as King. John’s story is quite distinct. So, what was John saying to his original first-century audience, and what does that mean for us now?

23rd August 2012 @ 7.30pm: ‘Following Jesus His Way?’ (with Brian Krum)

Jesus in John’s Gospel invites Christians to step out of their pious comfort zones, and to start being more intentionally relational, authentic, accepting and hospitable toward each other and the “least of these.” In short, John’s Gospel reminds us that we should be more of what we claim to be: followers of Jesus. Jesus hung out with tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers - “sinners” - and we are to model Jesus’ life, relationships, and Kingdom values in the same way. Jesus knocked down people’s sacred cows. He challenged their assumptions about what counts as “righteous” and “holy.” He taught and showed a new way to live, one that is outwardly directed rather than internally focused. He ate and drank with sinners—and so should we. He exhibited a posture of grace, openness and forgiveness toward others—and so should we. He denounced religious hypocrisy, because religion excludes, judges and denies, while Christianity includes, embraces, and offers life. Tonight we will look at what becomes barriers, and what becomes bridges, for us to do the same.
Beloved Disciple: 3 courses starting Wednesday 25th July @10am, Friday 27th July @ 1.30pm, and Monday 6th August @ 9.30am (choose one!).

A 10-week Beth Moore interactive women’s bible study on the life and ministry of John.

Ladies Gourmet Prayer Breakfast: Saturday 28th July 8.00am - 9.30am.

An opportunity for women to gather and eat together, hear an inspiring testimony (reflected in the experiences of Peter revealed in the Gospel of John) and pray together for our children, nieces and nephews.

Abiding Life: 5 sessions beginning Tuesday 7th August @ 7:15pm.

Abiding Life is about receiving the truth that there is ‘nothing the presence of Jesus cannot overcome.’ The intent of this course is to allow the Holy Spirit to deal with the blocks that prevent you from experiencing full life in Jesus.

Gospel of John: An in depth 6-session study starting Thursday 9th August @ 9.30am.

Follow Jesus on a journey involving discussion and revelation that will deepen your theology and change your life.

Getting Inside John’s Head: 3 sessions starting Monday 3rd September @ 7.30pm.

A study on John’s views of the trinity, salvation and end times.

SYNC Prayer and Worship Gathering: Tuesday 18th September @ 7.30pm.

Held at Northgate, this is an evening of prayer and worship, seeking God and allowing his Spirit freedom to bring the life we Jesus living and proclaiming.

Healing Service: Sunday 23rd September @ 2pm.

We believe in a God who has the power to heal, both physically and emotionally. Here’s an opportunity to gather with others to experience life and seek God’s healing for your situation.

Some commentaries on the Gospel of John that you might find useful (purchase from www.bookdepository.com):

Introductory:

John For Everyone - part one and two (by N T Wright). A guide to the New Testament Gospel of John including a highly readable discussion with background information, useful explanations, suggestions and thoughts as to how the text is relevant to our lives today. Part One covers Chapters 1-10; Part Two covers Chapters 11-21.

The NIV Application Commentary (by Gary Burge). The NIV commentary series helps build bridges that make the Bible come alive with meaning for contemporary life. This particular commentary helps unveil the deeply satisfying portrait of Christ painted in the Gospel of John.

Intermediate:

The Gospel According to John (by D A Carson). This commentary examines the flow of the biblical text, draws a few lines towards establishing how the Fourth Gospel contributes to biblical and systematic theology, and offers an expositon of John as an evangelistic Gospel.

Advanced:

The Gospel of John: A Commentary, 2 volumes (by Craig S Keener). A detailed commentary that includes significant references to extra-biblical material inviting us in to the world of John’s Gospel and providing an understanding within its social-historical context.

John (BECNT) (by Andreas Kostenberger). A readable study of the Gospel of John that provides an understanding of the historical context as well as a verse-by-verse commentary. Kostenberger also incorporates references to other ancient writings that help explain the Gospel’s theological, cultural, and social context.

Family Resources

Who Made God And Other Tricky Questions: A Theology For Children With Help From Mum and Dad (by Brian K Smith). A theology for children that provides what is necessary to grow a holistic faith which goes beyond cultural conviction and popular beliefs.

For more resources available during the series check out www.pressingon.org.nz.