

JOHN'S PURPOSE IN WRITING
JOHN 20:30-31

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Gospel of John is divided into two parts. In the first part the author selects a number of actions of Jesus which demonstrate different aspects of Jesus' revelation of God. He presents them not simply because they arouse wonder, but because of their symbolic or 'sign' value. These are some of the signs which Jesus did in the presence of his disciples.

We recall John's tragic conclusion to Part One: 'Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him'(12:27). He had already warned us of this in the Prologue: 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him'(1:10-11).

Yet, while most rejected him, there were those who continued to follow him, significantly the Twelve. When others were leaving him, Jesus asked them: 'Do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"'(6:67-69). As John goes on to say in his Prologue: 'To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God' (1:12).

Part Two is addressed to those who received him. John has just given us some of the signs which helped to bring them from the shock of Jesus' passion and death to believe in him as their glorified Lord and as 'God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart'(1:18).

Throughout the Gospel we have been privileged to share the insights of the Beloved Disciple into the mystery of Jesus' words and actions. He has been taking us to the heart of Jesus, for he has come to know him over the years they spent together prior to Calvary and over the years since, during which the Spirit of Jesus continued to draw him ever deeper into God's embrace. Now as he concludes his work he assures his readers that there is much more he could have written. Jesus 'did many other signs in the presence of his disciples' and each of the disciples had a story of how he or she was brought to faith through a mysterious encounter with the risen Christ.

Reflecting on his memories and on his experiences, he and the community of believers to which he belongs have come to an ever deeper understanding and appreciation of Jesus. It is this faith that he wishes to share in writing his Gospel. His aim is to carry on the very purpose for which God sent Jesus into the world: ‘that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’(3:15). Jesus himself has told us why he performed these ‘signs’. It was so that ‘even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father’(10:38). John declares that he wants us to ‘come to believe ... that through believing you may have life’ – an idea often repeated in the First Letter of John (see 1John 3:23; 5:1,5,10,13).

John wants us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Besides appealing to the Jews of his own day who continued to resist Jesus’ invitation coming to them through the Christian community, he wants to restate his conviction that Jesus is the fulfilment of the First Testament: ‘salvation is from the Jews’(4:22). Jesus is the Yes of a God who is faithful to his promises. However, we will understand Messiah properly only if we come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

There are different levels of belief. Very early in the Gospel we heard Nathanael say: ‘You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’(1:49). He still had a lot to see. We heard Martha say to Jesus: ‘Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God’(11:27). That was before Jesus showed his power over death and before his own death, resurrection and ascension to the Father. John’s understanding of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God, requires our entry into Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection and glorification. It is a faith that is possible only with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The supper discourses revealed the intimate relationship which Jesus as Son has with the Father and the nature of the mission which he has as the Messiah. The faith to which John is inviting us is the faith expressed at the end by Thomas. Jesus is the way to the Father. When we recognise the crucified Jesus with his wounds as our Lord and God, when we open our hearts to his Spirit and come to share the intimacy of his communion with his Father as ‘God the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart’(1:18), then we will ‘have life in his name’.

Jesus promised: ‘If you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you’(16:23). If we call upon him, we will experience his response. He will, as he promised, draw us mysteriously into the life which he has with the Father. Suffering with him, offering our lives in love with him, we will know his peace and his joy and one day will see him as he is: ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’(1John 3:2). No one is outside this promise: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life’(3:16).