

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 14

That You May Believe

John 20-21 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants watch every remaining thread come home: the Gospel's first question asked one last time in a garden at dawn, the sheep called by name, the breath of Genesis breathed again, Thomas completing the sentence the Prologue opened, a beatitude addressed directly to everyone in the room, a second charcoal fire, and a promissory note from Session 2 paid in full beside it: feed my sheep. The study ends where discipleship begins: follow me.

Catholic Touchstone: The risen Lord institutes the sacrament of Penance with the breath of the new creation (20:22-23; CCC 1461), accepts the Gospel's climactic act of worship, my Lord and my God (CCC 448), entrusts his whole flock to Peter (21:15-17; CCC 553, 881), and pronounces the beatitude the whole Church lives inside: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

A Note on Tonight's Format

This is the final session. Three logistics. First, bring the board, or a written reconstruction of it: every thread, both tallies, all seven predicates; the closing ceremony walks the finished board end to end, and it is the study's valediction. Second, plan food. The risen Lord's own gesture in chapter 21 is making breakfast for tired friends, and the fitting end to fourteen weeks together is a shared meal, tonight after the session or at a breakfast this week; announce it during Live It. Third, end on time and end warm: the last word of the Gospel to Peter is follow me, and the group should leave with it ringing rather than buried under a long goodbye.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 20 opens while it was still dark, and your light and darkness thread should hear it: the Gospel that plunged into night at 13:30 begins its final movement in the last of the dark, with dawn coming. Mary Magdalene finds the stone moved and runs; Peter and the beloved disciple run back, and John gives us the footrace with an eyewitness's pride: the other disciple outran Peter, waited at the entrance, and let Peter go in first. Love arrives first; Peter enters first: the pairing planted at the supper table is now choreography, intimacy and office deferring to each other at a tomb door. What they find is the Gospel's first resurrection evidence, and it is laundry: the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin, the *soudarion* that had been on his head, not lying with the cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Grave robbers do not undress a corpse, nor leave the face-cloth rolled apart in its own place. The scene says order, unhurried, deliberate: whatever happened here happened from the inside. And then the quiet astonishment of 20:8: the beloved disciple saw and believed, the first recorded believer in the resurrection of Jesus, and he believed without an appearance, on the evidence of burial cloths read with love's attention, a fact that will matter enormously when the chapter reaches its beatitude.

Mary's recognition scene (20:11-18) is the most tender writing in the Gospel, and nearly every sentence is a thread landing. The question: woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek? The bracket the

group has tracked since Session 2 closes here: what do you seek (1:38), whom do you seek (18:4), whom do you seek (20:15), the seek-question sounding for the last time, asked now by the risen Lord to a weeping woman. She supposes him to be the gardener, and John's crowning irony is that her mistake, the Fathers loved to say, tells the truth: in a garden mankind fell when its first gardener failed his trust, and in a garden the new Adam stands at dawn, the Gardener restored, tending what Eden lost. Then one word: Mary. The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name (10:3), and the group planted that verse five sessions ago; the payoff is a single spoken name that turns a stranger into Rabboni. The *noli me tangere*, do not hold me, is not rejection but redirection: I am ascending, the old mode of holding him is ending and a new one is coming, and Catholic hearts run straight to the altar where the ascended Lord still gives himself to be received. And the commission: go to my brethren, the first time in this Gospel Jesus calls the disciples brothers, the new family constituted at the cross already growing, and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father. Mary Magdalene becomes, in the Church's ancient phrase that St. Thomas Aquinas loved, the *apostolorum apostola*, the apostle to the apostles. One apologetic note worth giving plainly: in the first century a woman's testimony carried little legal weight, and an inventor had little to gain by placing women first at the tomb; the detail reads like memory, not craft.

The evening appearance (20:19-23) is dense with institution, and tonight's steelman lives in it. Peace be with you, twice: the bequest of 14:27 delivered in person by its testator. He shows them his hands and his side: the risen body keeps its wounds, glorified, not erased, the identity of the Crucified and the Risen One being the whole gospel in his skin. Then the sending: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you, the apostolic mission given its full weight, and then the act your group is equipped to hear like first-century Jews: he breathed on them. The verb is *enephsēsen*, and in the Greek Old Testament it is the verb of Genesis 2:7, the LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Twice in all of Scripture God breathes on men: once to make Adam live, and once, here, to make this ministry live. The group met Genesis 2:7 in Session 9, at the clay on a blind man's eyes; tonight the Creator's breath returns for the new creation. And what the breath creates is stated: receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. The Church has always heard here the institution of the sacrament of Penance (CCC 1461; Trent defined it), and Augustine's unbind him from Session 10 finds its charter. Prepare the steelman with full seriousness; the objection is sincere, widespread, and answerable from the verse's own grammar.

Thomas (20:24-29) completes the Gospel's deepest structure. The group met him gloomy and loyal (let us also go, that we may die with him, 11:16) and honest (we do not know the way, 14:5); he was absent for the first appearance and refuses secondhand joy: unless I see... I will never believe. Eight days later, note the liturgical rhythm, the following Sunday, Jesus comes for one man's doubt and offers exactly the evidence demanded: put your finger here. And Thomas answers with the sentence this entire Gospel was built to reach: my Lord and my God, *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*. Unseal the reserve your Session 2 press has held for twelve weeks: the Gospel opened, the Word was God (1:1), and it closes with a man confessing my God to Jesus' face, the *inclusio* complete, the frame closed, and Jesus does not correct him; he blesses him, and then pronounces the beatitude over everyone who was not in that room: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. The sign-faith thread, running since 2:23, resolves on your group personally: they are the ones the beatitude describes, fourteen weeks of believing without seeing, and the beloved disciple already modeled it at the tomb. Then the purpose statement (20:30-31), and two payoffs at once: these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, which is Martha's confession (11:27) nearly verbatim, the grieving woman at the tomb having spoken the Gospel's thesis four chapters early, exactly as your Session 10 note promised; and many other signs, not written, the evangelist tipping his hat to every argument your sign tally ever hosted.

Chapter 21 is the epilogue of restoration. Seven disciples fish all night and catch nothing, and 15:5 hums underneath: apart from me you can do nothing, demonstrated commercially. At dawn, the stranger on the beach, the command to cast on the right side, and a catch too heavy to haul: one hundred and fifty-three large fish, and the net was not torn. Hold the number lightly, the Fathers played with it endlessly, Jerome mentioning a tradition of 153 species of fish, the catch as all the nations, and the untorn net beside the seamless tunic as John's two images of a unity that must not be divided; the certain point is mission and abundance at the Lord's word. The pairing performs one last time: it is the Lord, the beloved disciple sees first; Peter, girding himself, jumps in the water, love recognizes and Peter acts. And on the beach: a charcoal fire, *anthrakia*, the word's second and final New Testament appearance, the plant from Session 13 paying off. The last time Peter stood at a charcoal fire he said I am not, three times, and Jesus has rebuilt the set: the same kind of fire lighting Peter's face, and this time the questions come from the Lord. Simon, son of John, do you love me? Three denials; three questions; three confessions; the wound reopened precisely so it can be healed clean. The famous verb variation, Jesus asking with *agapas* twice and Peter answering with *philō*, and Jesus asking the third time with Peter's own *phileis*, has been read both as the Lord stooping to meet Peter where his honesty can reach, and as simple Johannine synonym variation; the Fathers and the scholars divide, so hold it hedged and preach the certain thing: the threefold structure, and what each answer receives. Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep. The Good Shepherd, who owns the flock (my sheep), hands its care to Peter, and Session 2's promissory note, you shall be called Cephas, is paid at last: the rename discharges into an office, the shepherding of Ezekiel 34 delegated (CCC 553: the risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter; CCC 881). Then the cost: when you are old, you will stretch out your hands... showing by what death he was to glorify God, and Peter's boast from 13:37, I will lay down my life for you, borrowed then from 10:11 and unearned, is finally underwritten: he will lay it down, decades hence, in the death tradition remembers as crucifixion. And the command that ends the Gospel's story: follow me, said twice (21:19, 22), with the comparison to the beloved disciple's different path forbidden in between: if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me. Every vocation is its own. The last verses seal the witness: this is the disciple who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true, and the world itself could not contain the books. Then conduct the closing ceremony: the board, complete.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 2:7.** The LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: the only other divine breathing in Scripture, echoed verbatim at 20:22. Read aloud at the breath.
- **Genesis 2-3.** The garden, and the gardener who failed his trust. Leader background for Mary's beautiful mistake.
- **Ezekiel 34:15, 23.** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep... my servant shall feed them: the shepherding, fulfilled in Jesus in Session 9, now delegated to Peter. Callback, not new lookup.
- **Psalms 30:5.** Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Optional read-aloud over the Magdalene scene.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 26

On Thomas, Gregory refuses to scold: the disbelief of Thomas, he preaches, has done more for our faith than the belief of the other disciples, for as he touches and is convinced, our own minds are

settled past doubting. Do you suppose it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not chance but divine arrangement: the doubter's hand in the wounds healed the wound of our unbelief.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 20

Aquinas gives Mary Magdalene the Church's ancient title with full honors: apostolorum apostola, the apostle of the apostles. As a woman first brought the words of death to a man in Eden, he observes with the Fathers, so a woman is first entrusted with the words of life at the tomb: go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending. The order of the fall is reversed in the order of the announcement, and the first human voice ever to preach the resurrection was hers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 88

On the beach, Chrysostom hears what the threefold question is for: Jesus asks nothing about the denial, exacts no accounting of the courtyard; he asks only, do you love me, because love is the one qualification he examines for what comes next. And the proof of love he appoints is not tears or vigils but the care of the flock: if you love me, tend my sheep, take charge of your brethren. The love of Christ, Chrysostom says, is verified in shepherding what Christ loves; Peter's penance is a job, and the job is love made visible until his own stretched-out hands complete it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1461.** Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his apostles: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. Bishops and priests continue to exercise this ministry; the sacrament of Penance stands on tonight's verse.
- **CCC 976.** The Apostles' Creed ties the forgiveness of sins to this scene: the risen Lord conferred on the apostles his own divine power to forgive.
- **CCC 448.** Thomas' my Lord and my God as the Church's own confession before the risen Christ, cited by the Catechism as the pattern of adoring faith.
- **CCC 644-645.** The risen body: the same body that was crucified, bearing the marks of the Passion, now glorified, not a ghost and not a resuscitation.
- **CCC 553 and 881.** The risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter: the pastoral office of binding, loosing, and feeding the whole flock, the payoff of you shall be called Cephas.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

FINAL SESSION: EVERYTHING LANDS. Know the payoffs cold: whom do you seek (1:38, 18:4, 20:15, bracket closed); light and darkness (still dark, then dawn on the beach); the garden (Eden, arrest, tomb, and the Gardener recognized); sheep called by name (10:3, one word: Mary); the breath (Genesis 2:7 at 20:22); unbind him (Session 10) chartered at 20:23; the I AM inclusio (1:1 to 20:28, the Session 2 reserve paid); sign-faith resolved on the group itself (20:29); Martha's creed as

the purpose statement (11:27 to 20:31); the tally honored by the author (20:30); the charcoal fire (18:18 to 21:9); the Cephas note paid (1:42 to 21:15-17); Peter's boast underwritten (13:37 to 21:18-19); Thomas (11:16 to 20:28); and the untorn net beside the seamless tunic.

The closing ceremony. After the last Build question, walk the finished board aloud, thread by thread, start to finish, letting group members narrate the threads they remember best. Fourteen weeks of architecture deserves fourteen minutes of victory lap. End the walk at the two words the Gospel ends its story with: follow me.

The Lamb, standing. One grace note for the very end, from the Johannine Revelation (in the Church's traditional attribution), the throne vision shows a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). Standing: alive; as though slain: the marks retained, like the hands and side of 20:20. The Lamb your group beheld is not a past tense. He is standing, wounds and all, and every Mass looks at him.

Session Goals

1. Participants watch the whom-do-you-seek bracket close, hear the sheep called by name, and receive the gardener's irony as the new creation's announcement.
2. Participants connect the breath of 20:22 to Genesis 2:7 and hear 20:23 with its full institutional weight, having weighed the declarative reading at full strength.
3. Participants witness the 1:1 to 20:28 inclusio complete in Thomas' confession, and receive 20:29's beatitude as addressed to themselves.
4. Participants stand at the second charcoal fire, watch the threefold restoration pay the Cephas note into the office of feeding the sheep, and hear Peter's boast finally underwritten.
5. Participants walk the completed board, and leave with the Gospel's last command to Peter ringing as their own: follow me.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and one Win, 8 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. THE BOARD, COMPLETE, 12 minutes, protected. Send, Live It, closing prayer, and the announcement of the celebration meal, 15 minutes. Pre-chosen cuts, in order: the 153-fish discussion (one sentence: mission, abundance, and an untorn net), Psalm 30:5, and the Dig Deeper. Do not cut: the race and the cloths, the Magdalene scene, the breath with the steelman, Thomas with the beatitude, the second fire with the threefold restoration, or the board walk. If anything must shrink, shrink your commentary; the texts tonight need almost no help.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, it is still dark, and we are running to the tomb one last time together. For fourteen weeks you have called us by name, fed us, washed us, and let us watch you love to the end. Tonight, finish what you began in us: let us see, and believe, and hear the last thing you said to Peter as said to us. We ask it through you, our Lord and our God. Amen.

Win (one question only tonight)

1. What is the best reunion you have ever been part of, the kind where someone thought lost came back? What was the first moment of recognition like?

Transition: The Gospel's last movement begins while it is still dark, in a garden, with a woman weeping at the wrong conclusion. Bring the board where everyone can see it; it earns its retirement tonight.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 20:1-10 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Note the clock in the first verse for the board's oldest line. Then the footrace: who outruns whom, who waits, who enters first, and what does the choreography of these two men, running since a supper table, quietly say? And the evidence they find: describe it exactly. What does that arrangement rule out, and what does verse 8 say the beloved disciple did, on the strength of what?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

While it was still dark: the Gospel that fell into night at 13:30 opens its finale in the last of the darkness, with dawn on the way; the light and darkness line is about to end in morning. The race: the beloved disciple outruns Peter, and then waits, and lets Peter enter first. Love arrives first; office enters first; intimacy defers to authority and authority is beaten to every tomb by love: the Church has been running this two-man race ever since, and both runners are necessary. The evidence: the linen cloths lying there, and the face-cloth not with them but rolled up in a place by itself. Grave robbers do not unwrap a corpse, and nobody in a hurry rolls a cloth and sets it apart; the scene testifies to order, unhurried, from the inside. And verse 8: he saw and believed, resurrection faith's first recorded dawn, and it happened without an appearance, on the evidence of burial cloths read with love's attention. Hold that fact; a beatitude at the end of this chapter will want it.

Question 2. Read 20:11-18, slowly; nearly every line is one of our threads landing. Count the landings with the board in view: the question Jesus asks her, and where this Gospel has asked it before, first and latest; her mistake about his identity, and why, in a Gospel that began by rewriting Genesis, the mistake is actually the truth; the one word that opens her eyes, and which verse of chapter 10 it keeps; and her commission, with the title the Church gave her for it.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Whom do you seek: the bracket closes. The Gospel's first words from Jesus were what do you seek (1:38); in the garden of arrest, whom do you seek (18:4); and now, risen, to a weeping woman, whom do you seek (20:15), the seek-question's final return across the whole book, and it is still the

question. The gardener: she is wrong and she is right, John's crowning irony. Humanity fell in a garden under a gardener who failed his trust; at dawn in a garden stands the new Adam, the Gardener restored, tending what Eden lost, and the tomb is empty behind him. Then one word: Mary. The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name (10:3), and the verse the group logged five sessions ago is kept in a single spoken name; she turns, and the stranger is Rabboni. Do not hold me is redirection, not rejection: the ascended Lord will be held a new way, and Catholic hearts go straight to the altar where. And the commission: go to my brethren, the first brethren of the Gospel, the family born at the cross already growing, making Mary Magdalene what Aquinas and the tradition call her, apostolorum apostola, the apostle to the apostles: the first human voice ever to announce the resurrection was a woman's, a detail an inventor had little reason to choose, and one the tradition never smoothed away.

Question 3 (live discovery). Read 20:19-23. Inventory the evening: what does he say twice, and where did our study last hear that bequest? What does he show them, and what does it mean that the risen body kept them? Then the sending, and the act: he breathed on them. Send the group to Genesis 2:7 and read it aloud. How many times in all of Scripture does God breathe on human beings, and what did each breath create? Then read verse 23 once more and hold it; its own argument comes next.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Peace be with you, twice: the bequest of 14:27, my peace I give to you, delivered now in person by the risen testator, and given to men hiding behind locked doors with their failure, which tells you whom the peace is for. He shows them his hands and his side: the risen body keeps the wounds, glorified rather than erased; the Risen One is forever the Crucified One, identity intact, the whole gospel written in his skin (CCC 644-645). Then: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you, and he breathed on them, enephysēsen, and Genesis 2:7 stands up in the room: the LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. Twice, in the whole of Scripture, God breathes on men: once to make Adam live, and once, in a locked room on Easter evening, to make this live: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Whatever verse 23 institutes, it was worth the second breathing of God in the history of the world. Now let us hear the other reading at full strength.

Steelman: Declare Forgiveness, or Forgive?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

The Protestant reading of 20:23 is sincere, ancient in its instincts, and deserves its best form. Only God can forgive sins, the argument begins, and the scribes of Mark 2:7 were right about the principle even while wrong about the Person; there is one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), and inserting a human tribunal between the sinner and the Savior rebuilds the wall Christ died to remove. So verse 23, on this reading, is declarative, not judicial: the disciples, and through them all believers, are commissioned to announce the terms of forgiveness, whoever believes is forgiven, whoever refuses is not, proclaiming an amnesty God alone enacts. Notice, the argument adds, that the New Testament never once shows an apostle hearing a private confession or pronouncing an absolution; auricular confession as Catholics know it develops visibly across later centuries. The verse founds evangelism, not a confessional; the keys open the gospel to the

world, they do not lock a screen in a box. State it whole; millions of earnest Christians read it exactly so.

Question 4 (press from the text). Three probes, the first from the verse's own grammar. First: the sentence has two halves; the declarative reading explains forgive, but read the second half aloud: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Can a general announcement of amnesty retain anything, and what would retaining a particular person's particular sins require the minister to know, and how would he come to know it? Second: weigh the scene's machinery, the solemn sending, the second breathing of God in all Scripture, the conferral of the Spirit. Is that apparatus proportioned to authorizing what every believer could already do, tell people the gospel? Third: does the Catholic reading actually rival Mark 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:5, or fulfill them, and what does the Church say the priest is doing in that box?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the grammar is the Council of Trent's own argument, and it has never been answered: retention breaks the declarative reading. A herald announcing terms of amnesty forgives, in a loose sense, everyone who accepts; and when the reading's careful advocates apply retention to the unrepentant, notice the concession: retention has become a judgment about this person and these sins, and no minister can judge what he has not heard. The power to retain presupposes disclosure; confession is not a medieval addition to the verse, it is the verse's own working condition. The Lord built a ministry with two verbs, and the second verb requires a penitent's voice. Second, the proportion: locked doors, the wounds displayed, the apostolic sending in the very shape of the Son's own mission, and then the only divine breathing since Eden, conferring the Holy Spirit for this stated purpose. Heaven does not deploy the breath of Genesis to authorize what was never forbidden; every disciple could already share the good news, and no new creation was needed for it. The apparatus is institution-shaped because an institution is what it makes: a ministry of reconciliation lodged in the apostolic body (CCC 1461), the unbinding Augustine heard commanded at Lazarus' tomb, now chartered. Third, no rivalry: the Church confesses with Mark's scribes that God alone forgives sins, and reads verse 23's passives as Scripture reads such passives, they are forgiven, by God, whose minister speaks; the priest absolves in persona Christi, the one Mediator exercising his own mediation through the body he breathed on, exactly as in Baptism a man pours water and God regenerates. Ask the room, gently, which reading costs more and gives more: an announcement you could hear from anyone, or a moment when a particular voice, ordained in a line running back to a locked room, says to your named and spoken sins, I absolve you, and the verse's first verb happens to you in the present tense. The Church has been spending Easter evening's gift for twenty centuries; it is spent one penitent at a time, and it is waiting for everyone here, this week.

Question 5. Read 20:24-29. Give Thomas his due: recall his two earlier lines in this study. What does he demand, and what does Jesus, arriving eight days later, on a Sunday, offer him? Then the confession: read it aloud, and open the reserve our Session 2 press has held for twelve weeks: set 20:28 beside 1:1. What structure just completed? What does Jesus not do, and what does he do instead, and over whom is the final beatitude spoken? Look around the table as you answer that last one.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Thomas: let us also go, that we may die with him (11:16), and Lord, we do not know the way (14:5), loyal, gloomy, allergic to comfortable words, and now refusing secondhand joy: unless I see, I will never believe. Eight days later, the next Sunday, the Lord comes back for one man's doubt and offers the exact evidence demanded: put your finger here. We are not told Thomas touched; we are told what he said: my Lord and my God, ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou, and the reserve opens: the Gospel began, and the Word was God (1:1), and it ends with a man confessing my God to Jesus' face. The inclusio is complete; the frame the group discovered in Session 1 and defended in Session 2 closes on the far side of the resurrection, and Jesus does not correct the worship, he blesses it, which is itself the last quiet divinity datum of the book (CCC 448). St. Gregory the Great preached that Thomas' doubt has done more for our faith than the others' belief; in providence nothing, not even a bad week, is wasted. And then the beatitude, spoken over the heads of everyone in that room toward everyone not in it: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Leader, stop and look around the table: the sign-faith thread that opened at 2:23 resolves here, on this group, tonight. Fourteen weeks of believing without seeing; the beloved disciple modeled it at the tomb; the beatitude is theirs by name, and they should be allowed a moment to feel blessed.

Question 6. Read 20:30-31, the sentence the whole Gospel was written to say. Two payoffs to collect. First: whose confession, nearly word for word, from which tomb-side conversation in this study, is the purpose statement quoting? Second: what does verse 30 admit about signs, and what fourteen-week game of ours does it graciously acknowledge?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. And the group heard that creed before the evangelist wrote it: Martha, at her brother's tomb, before the miracle, yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world (11:27). The grieving woman spoke the Gospel's thesis statement four chapters early, and Session 10's promise is kept: her exact words mattered enormously. A woman gave this Gospel its central confession, a woman first announced its resurrection, and its stated purpose is her creed, offered to every reader. And verse 30: many other signs, which are not written in this book: the author himself confirms what the tally taught us, the signs were selected, curated, arranged, and on the count the group has kept, seven fingers pointing, and the group's fourteen weeks of arguing over what counts was exactly the reading John designed for. He wrote so that we would believe; the tally was the syllabus.

Question 7. Read 21:1-14. Savor the staging: what do seven professionals catch in a full night without him, and which verse from Session 12 is being demonstrated commercially? At dawn, who recognizes the stranger first and who hits the water first, one last performance of whose pairing? Handle the 153 and the untorn net in one sentence each. And then the detail our board has waited two sessions for: what is burning on the beach, and where is the only other one in the entire New Testament?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Nothing: seven experienced fishermen, all night, nothing, and 15:5 hums underneath, apart from me you can do nothing, demonstrated at market rates. At his word, one cast, and a haul too heavy to lift: 153 large fish, mission and abundance, the Fathers seeing all the nations in the number, and the net was not torn, John's second image, beside the seamless tunic, of a unity that must not be

divided. The pairing performs its finale: it is the Lord, the beloved disciple sees first, and Peter, girding himself, throws himself into the sea, love recognizes, Peter acts, both runners still running. And on the beach: a charcoal fire, anthrakia, the second and last in the New Testament. The first one (18:18) lit a courtyard where Peter, warming himself, said I am not, three times. Jesus has rebuilt the scene: the same kind of firelight on Peter's face, bread and fish in the Lord's hands as once on a hillside, and breakfast set by the risen God before tired friends. He does not heal Peter's wound around the fire. He heals it at the fire. What that healing sounds like is the next reading, and it is the reason we told you in Session 13: remember this fire.

Question 8. Read 21:15-19, slowly; this is the payment of the study's oldest promissory note. Count the questions and set them against a number from the courtyard. Note, hedged, the famous variation in the love-verbs, and then land on what is certain: what does each confession receive, whose sheep are they, and which prophet's double promise from Session 9 is being handed on? What was Peter promised in 1:42, and what discharges tonight? Then the future: whose boast from 13:37 is finally underwritten, and what are the Gospel's last words of command to him, and to us?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Three questions for three denials, at a charcoal fire for a charcoal fire: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Nothing about the courtyard, no accounting demanded; as St. John Chrysostom preached, the only qualification examined is love, because love is the whole job description of what is being conferred. The verb variation, Jesus asking with agapas twice and receiving Peter's humbler philō, then asking the third time in Peter's own word, has been read as the Lord stooping to where Peter's honesty can reach, and also as simple synonym style; hold it lightly. What is certain is what each answer receives: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep, my sheep, the flock remains the Lord's, and its care is placed in Peter's hands: Ezekiel 34's shepherding, which only the God-man could fulfill, now delegated to the man he renamed. The Session 2 promissory note, you shall be called Cephas, rock, pays out tonight into an office: the risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter (CCC 553, 881), and the Church sees that pastoral charge continuing in Peter's successors (CCC 881-882). Then the cost: when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, the death by which he would glorify God, and Peter's boast from the supper, I will lay down my life for you, borrowed unearned from the Good Shepherd, is finally underwritten: decades hence, in the martyr's death ancient tradition remembers as a cross, he will pay it, and this time the Lord accepts the pledge. And then the command, given twice, with comparison to the beloved disciple's different road forbidden in between (what is that to you?): follow me. The Gospel's story ends where discipleship begins, in two words addressed to a forgiven man beside a fire, and through him, to everyone who has ever read this book.

Question 9. Read 21:24-25, the last verses. Who signs the book, what do the elders around him countersign, and what does the final sentence confess about everything we have spent fourteen weeks on?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things: the man from the bosom (13:23), from the foot of the cross (19:35), from the tomb door (20:8), signs his testimony; and a we steps forward to countersign, and we know that his testimony is true, the voice

of a community vouching for its witness, by ancient tradition the church of Ephesus around its apostle, for the witness. And the last sentence bows out with a smile: were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Fourteen weeks, seven signs, seven I AMs, one Lamb, and the author's closing confession is that he showed us a thimbleful of the sea. Now bring the board forward; it has earned its ceremony.

THE BOARD, COMPLETE

CLOSING CEREMONY: walk the finished board

Stand at the board and walk it aloud, thread by thread, inviting group members to narrate the ones they remember best. The Hour: planted at a wedding, shield over the plot, turned by the Greeks, kept like an appointment, named as labor, finished at the sixth hour. The signs: seven, from water made wine to a dead man walking, counted by the group when the author put down his pen, and confessed at the end to be a selection from a sea. The I AMs: I am not from a Baptist, I AM to a Samaritan woman, on the waves, before Abraham, flattening a cohort in a garden; and seven predicates, bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, way and truth and life, vine. The dwelling: tent, ladder, temple of his body, and then, us. The water: a well, a cry at a feast, and an opened side. Light and darkness: a lamp-lit night visitor, a feast of candelabras, and it was night, and then, dawn on a beach. The Woman: Cana to Calvary. Nicodemus: night to daylight, a hundred pounds of myrrh. Peter: a rename, a boast, a bird, two fires, three questions, one office, follow me. Thomas: die with him, show me, my Lord and my God. And the Lamb: beheld, unexplained, counted in Passovers, eaten at Capernaum, slain at the hour of the lambs on hyssop with no bone broken, opened into blood and water, and announced at every elevation until the end of the world. Then the grace note: in the Revelation tradition joins to this same John, the throne vision shows a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). Standing: alive. As though slain: the wounds retained, like the hands and side he showed in the locked room. The Lamb you have beheld for fourteen weeks is not a past tense. He is standing. And this Sunday, when the priest raises him before Communion and says the Baptist's words over him, you will behold him, and then, because the Lamb of Exodus was never merely beheld, you will go up and receive him. Class dismissed; supper is served; follow me.

DIG DEEPER

For the road. John wrote a Gospel, three letters, and the Revelation, and the letters read like this study's alumni mail: the same beloved disciple, decades on, writing to churches full of people who had not seen and yet believed, about light and darkness, abiding, love one another, and the water and the blood. If this group wants a next chapter together, the Letters of St. John are the natural road, and the study That You May Know awaits: the aged apostle, making sure his little children know what they have.

Synthesis question. Last one of the study, and everyone answers: the Gospel's final command, given twice on the beach, is two words. Say them, and then say, concretely, what following looks like for you starting Monday.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Follow me. Let every person answer with something real: a sacrament returned to, a vocation examined, an Andrew-style invitation owed, a mother taken eis ta idia, a Sunday beheld with new eyes, a next study begun. Do not polish their answers; the Lord accepted Peter's philō, and he will accept these. Close by naming what the group has actually done: fourteen weeks ago they sealed a guess about a strange title, and tonight they walked out of an empty tomb knowing the Lamb by name, standing, wounds and all. The Gospel was written that you may believe, and that believing you may have life in his name. It worked on the beloved disciple's first readers. By the grace of God, it has been working here.

Send

1. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe: that beatitude was written about you, specifically, on purpose. Do you receive it, and what would living like a blessed person change this month?
2. Do you love me? He is asking you tonight, by name, with no accounting of your courtyards demanded. Answer him honestly, and then hear the commission that always follows the answer: who are the sheep being handed to you, in your family, your parish, your friendships, and what would feeding them look like?

Live It This Week

- **Receive Easter evening's gift.** Go to Confession this week. The sacrament was instituted with the second breathing of God in the history of the world, and it has been waiting, one penitent at a time, for twenty centuries. Kneel where the breath still works, name your sins to the wounded and risen Lord through his minister, and hear the verse happen to you in the present tense: they are forgiven.
- **Make breakfast.** The risen God's first recorded act of the new age, after forgiving and sending, was a breakfast laid for tired friends. Host a meal this week, for this group as its celebration, or for someone who needs one, and let the hospitality be your alleluia. Come and have breakfast is also a spirituality.
- **Keep following.** Choose your next step before Sunday, and tell one person what it is: re-read John alone, slowly, one chapter a week, now that you can hear it; or gather the group again for the Letters of St. John and That You May Know; and this Sunday, behold the Lamb, raised before Communion, with everything you now carry, and answer the supper invitation with the strongest Amen of your life.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud, and let the group stand: Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, our Lord and our God: in the beginning you were the Word, and you became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld your glory. You gave us wine at the wedding, water at the well, bread on the hillside, light at the feast, and your own flesh for the life of the world. You washed our feet, you loved us to the end, and it is finished. You called Mary by her name in the garden; call us by ours. You breathed on your apostles; breathe on your Church still. You asked Peter three times and gave him your sheep; ask us, and give us someone to feed. We have not seen, and we believe, and you have called us blessed. Now we hear your last command as our first: we will follow you. Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the

world; and blessed, blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK, AND KEEP IT: John 20:29

Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. (RSV2CE)

This is the Gospel's beatitude for its readers: for the beloved disciple's first audience, for every generation since, and, as of fourteen weeks ago, for this group by name. Carry it.

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 14, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 20:1-10** · still dark, the race, the cloths and the soudarion, he saw and believed
- **John 20:11-18** · whom do you seek (compare 1:38 and 18:4), the gardener, Mary (compare 10:3), do not hold me, go to my brethren
- **Psalms 30:5** · optional read-aloud, joy comes with the morning
- **John 20:19-23** · peace twice (compare 14:27), the wounds, the sending, the breath, forgive and retain
- **Genesis 2:7** · live discovery, the only other breathing of God; read aloud at 20:22
- **Mark 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:5** · steelman texts, God alone forgives, one mediator; handled in the press
- **John 20:24-29** · Thomas, my Lord and my God (compare 1:1), the final beatitude
- **John 20:30-31** · the purpose statement (compare 11:27), many other signs not written
- **John 21:1-14** · the night of nothing (compare 15:5), the catch, 153 and the untorn net, the second charcoal fire (compare 18:18), breakfast
- **John 21:15-19** · the threefold restoration, feed my sheep (compare 1:42, Ezekiel 34), the death foretold (compare 13:37), follow me
- **John 21:20-25** · what is that to you, the witness signed and countersigned, the world could not contain
- **Revelation 5:6** · ceremony grace note, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain
- **CCC 448, 553, 644-645, 881, 976, 1461** · Catechism connections