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The Missing Feast of Pentecost. John 1,19–2,12<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article argues that the Festival of Weeks/Pentecost provides a liturgical and theological background to the initial scenes in the Fourth Gospel. The sequence of days in John 1,19-51 and key words in the Cana pericope allude to the Sinai experience as it came to be remembered and celebrated in the first century.

One major section of the Fourth Gospel concerns a sequence of annual Jewish festivals and the weekly celebration of Sabbath. Beginning in chapter 5 with Sabbath, followed by chapter 6 (Passover), 7,1-10,21 (Tabernacles) and 10,22-42 (Dedication), these chapters appropriate key aspects of the Feasts to Jesus. In chapter 5 Jesus has the authority to give life and judge, which were two privileged „works“ reserved for God on the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> At Passover Jesus reveals himself as the „Bread of Life“ and the „bread that came down from heaven“ (6,35, 41). In the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus reveals himself as the source of water to the thirsty (7,37-39), the „light of the world“ (8,12), and as Son worthy of worship (9,38). During the Feast of Dedication, recalling the consecration of the altar and Temple by the Maccabees, Jesus declares that he is the one „whom the Father has consecrated and sent“ (10,36). Passover and Tabernacles were the pilgrim festivals celebrated in Spring and Autumn; the one festival missing from this sequence is that of Weeks/Pentecost,<sup>3</sup> which was the summer festival celebrated 50 days after Passover. Some scholars speak of John 20,22 as a „Johannine Pentecost,“ influenced by Luke’s association of Weeks/Pentecost with the coming of the Spirit, but this is to accept Luke’s theology of the Spirit and transpose it to John.<sup>4</sup> If we disassociate

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<sup>1</sup> The article is a modified version of an article published in the *Australian Biblical Review* 55 (2007) 41-56, and is part of a larger study now published as M. L. Coloe *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007). I am grateful to the editors of SNTU for the opportunity to make this available to a European audience.

<sup>2</sup> An excellent study of the juridical processes in John 5 can be found in Martin Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (WUNT 2:132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The Festival is known as „Shavu’ot“ in the Hebrew text and „Pentecost“ in the Greek.

<sup>4</sup> In her discussion of John 20,22 Sandra Schneiders comments, „the relation of this account to the Lukan Pentecost scene, however, is not one of literary or theological dependen-

Pentecost/Weeks from Luke's theology and consider the Jewish Festival in its own liturgical context I believe we may find clues to why this festival is missing from the Johannine sequence through chapters 5 to 10 described above. These clues lead me to propose that the missing festival is not to be found in John 20, but rather in the first gathering of the disciples across Jn 1,19–2,12.<sup>5</sup>

### Sinai and Pentecost

By New Testament times the annual pilgrim Festival of Weeks, which is also known as „First Fruits“ and in the later Greek books as „Pentecost“,<sup>6</sup> was linked to the memory and celebration of the events at Sinai during the Exodus. In its origins, the festival was simply a harvest festival, a day of thanksgiving for God's care and bounty in the harvest. In response to God's gifts of the grain, the people brought offerings of their first fruits. For most of the Old Testament period, there is no indication that this is linked to an event in Israel's history, but by the time of the book of Jubilees, (ca. 150 B.C.E.)<sup>7</sup> First Fruits is associated with a series of covenant rituals (Noah, Jub 6,1,18; Abraham and the Sinai covenant Jub 15,1; 6,11).<sup>8</sup> According to Jubilees, all the covenants were made in the third month, which is the month the Israelites arrive at Sinai (Exod 19,1). The community at Qumran also kept this feast in the third month and this may have been the occasion for admitting new members to the community.<sup>9</sup>

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ce and I do not think the term ‚Johannine Pentecost‘ is particularly helpful. This is one of a number of accounts in the New Testament of ‚comings of‘ or ‚gifts of‘ the Spirit to individuals or to groups, during the first days of the Church's existence. Trying to harmonize these accounts, relativize all of them in terms of the Lukan event, or reduce them to one is neither necessary nor helpful.“ See S. M. Schneiders, „The Raising of the New Temple: John 20,19–23 and Johannine Ecclesiology,“ *NTS* 52 (2006) 352.

<sup>5</sup> The association of Cana and Sinai was first proposed by Francis Moloney and in what follows I will extend his suggestion and show how the Festival of Weeks links the events of 1,19–2,12 and provides a rich theological and liturgical insight into the gathering of the first disciples.

<sup>6</sup> Feast of the Harvest (Exod 23,16), Feast of Weeks (Deut 16,10), day of the First Fruits (Num 28,26; Exod 23,16; 34,22; Lev 23,17), Pentecost (Tob 2,1; 2Macc 12,32). See J. C. VanderKam, „Weeks, Festival of,“ *ABD*, 6. 895. The name „Feast of the harvest“ may have been its original title; see J. C. Rylaarsdam, „Weeks, Feast of,“ *IDB*, 4. 827.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. VanderKam, „Jubilees,“ *ABD*, 3. 1030.

<sup>8</sup> VanderKam, „Weeks, Festival of,“ 896.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 896. „D'après des manuscrits inédits de Qumrân, on sait maintenant qu'en ce jour se célébraient l'entrée des nouveaux membres dans la communauté et le renouvellement

Following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. the rabbis shifted the focus from the celebration of the covenants, to the celebration of the gift of the Law on Sinai. The earliest reference to this association with Torah is attributed to Rabbi El'azar ben Pedath (ca. 270 C.E.): „Pentecost is the day on which Torah was given.“<sup>10</sup> The festival during biblical time was never assigned a precise day since it was calculated in relation to the day of the ‚wave offering‘ at Passover time (Lev 23,15-16; Deut 16,9-10).

At Sinai Moses instructs the people to be consecrated and prepared „for the third day; because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people“ (Exod 19,10-11). Moses then informs the people „Prepare for the third day“ (Exod 19,15). The narrative continues, „On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud upon the mountain“ (Exod 19,16). Following the covenant ceremony in chapter 24 Moses ascends the mountain and God's glory settles on the mountain (Exod 24,16-17).<sup>11</sup> In response to Moses' instructions the people affirm „Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do“ (Exod 19,8; 24,3, 7).

When turning to the Gospel of John there is one pericope where many of the words of Exodus 19-24 find a parallel. The Cana narrative begins with the words, „On the third day“ (2,1), and concludes with a statement that this was the first sign where Jesus „revealed his glory“ (*doxa*) (2,11). In the course of the narrative, the mother of Jesus says to the servants, „Do whatever he tells you“ (2,5). These three expressions suggest a deliberate allusion to the revelation of God's glory, on the third day at Sinai (Exodus 19-24) during which the Israelites affirm, „Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do“ (Exod 19,8; 24,3, 7).

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de l'alliance.“ See, J. Potin, *La Fête Juive de la Pentecôte: Étude des Textes Liturgiques*, Lection Divina 65 (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Rylaarsdam, „Weeks, Feast of,“ 827; for a study of the feast in the Rabbinic tradition see Potin, *La Fête Juive de la Pentecôte*, 131-40.

<sup>11</sup> Within the Greek Old Testament, the term ‚glory‘ (*doxa*) is a technical expression reserved to translate the Hebrew word *kabod*, which is associated with weightiness in the sense of a person's honour. In English, this becomes ‚glory‘. Within the LXX, the term *doxa* comes to mean the divine revelation of God's essential nature in the created world. See R. G. Bratcher, „What does ‚glory‘ mean in relation to Jesus? Translating *doxa* and *doxazo* in John,“ *Bible Translator* 42 (1991) 401-8; C. Spicq, „*doxa*, *doxazō*, *syndoxazō*,“ in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 362-79; G. von Rad and G. Kittel, „*doxa*,“ *TDNT*, 2. 238-46.

In the liturgical celebration of Weeks the three days of Exodus 19 were prefaced by four days of remote preparation.<sup>12</sup> The fourth day of this remote preparation is also the first of three days of immediate preparation according to the Exodus account. These preparations culminate therefore on „the third day,“ or the sixth from the beginning of the sequence. According to Moloney, „This time-scheme shapes the order of the events reported in John 1,19–2,12.“<sup>13</sup>

#### Structure 1,19–2,12

Day 1 (vv. 19-28) John's testimony to the Jerusalem delegation.

Day 2 (vv. 29-34) John's testimony to Jesus' baptism.

Day 3 (vv. 35-42) Two of John's disciples follow Jesus. Andrew brings Peter to Jesus.

Day 4/1 (vv. 43-51) Day 1 of the Exodus 3 days of preparation. Philip and Nathanael.

Day 5/2

Day 6/3 (vv. 2,1-12) The ‚third day‘ of the Exodus days of preparation. The revelation of Jesus' glory in Cana.

The sequence and numbering of six days is found in other Jewish writing. The Mekhilta (ca. 250 CE) on Exodus 19,10–11 describes the giving of the Torah on the 6<sup>th</sup> Day. „Und der Ewige sprach zu Mose: Geh zu dem Volke und heilige sie heute, d. i. der 4. Tag. Und morgen, d. i. der 5. Tag. Und sie sollen bereit sein für den dritten Tag, d. i. der 6. Tag, an welchem die Thora gegeben wurde.“<sup>14</sup> It goes on to say that the fifth day was given to the building of an altar and the sealing of the covenant with the blood ritual described in Exodus 24. The Mekhilta then repeats that it was on the third day, i.e. day six that the Torah was given.

This naming of days in a sequence is similar to the Targum version of the Sinai revelation (Ps-Jon Exodus 19,1-4) which gives the following:

On the first day of the month, they came to the wilderness of Sinai (19,1).

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<sup>12</sup> F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 50.

<sup>13</sup> Moloney, *John*, 50. The sequence of days is highlighted by the repetition of the phrase, „the next day“ (1:29, 35, 43).

<sup>14</sup> See J. Winter and A. Wünsche, *Mekhilta: Ein tannaitischer Midrasch zu Exodus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909) 198. The Mekhilta attributed to R. Ishmael is dated by many scholars ca. 250 C.E.; see J. Neusner, „Mekhilta Attributed to R. Ishmael (Exodus),“ in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism* (ed. W. S. Green; New York: Continuum, 1999–2003) 1161–63.

On the second day, Moses went up to the top of the mountain (19,3).

On the third day the Lord said to Moses, „Behold I will reveal myself to you in the thickness of the cloud of glory“ (19,9).

On the fourth day the Lord said to Moses, „Go to the people and prepare them today and tomorrow... Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will reveal himself“ (19,10-1).

On the third day, on the sixth of the month ... the Lord was revealed on Mount Sinai (19,16, 20).

Since a similar numbering of days is found in the Mekhilta, we can conclude that such a detailed ordering was part of early rabbinic Judaism. One significant difference between the Targum and the Mekhilta is that on the 6<sup>th</sup> day the Targum emphasizes the revelation of God, whereas the Mekhilta places the emphasis on the giving of the Law. This suggests that the Targum tradition is closer to the traditions found in the first century prior to the destruction of the Temple, since after the destruction the rabbis shift the focus to the Torah.<sup>15</sup>

When considering the likelihood that John 1,19–2,12 is shaped by the Festival of First Fruits, I have given attention to the similarities between words found in the Cana pericope and the Sinai covenant found in Exodus 19–24. From the evidence of the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Sinai covenant was memorialized in the Pentecost Festival by the first century. The Targum and the Mekhilta offer support to this thesis, and add the possibility that in the Synagogue liturgy the Exodus account had enumerated a sequence of six day.

### First Fruits

The Nathanael episode provides further considerations supporting the Festival of Pentecost/First Fruits as the likely background for this passage. The Hebrew word for First Fruits (*bikkurim*) means literally „early figs.“<sup>16</sup> In Hebrew, various terms describe the fig at different stages of its development. The early fig is called the *bikkûrâ* (Isa 28,4 etc) which usually ripens in June,<sup>17</sup> the third month according to biblical calculations, co-inciding with the festival of First Fruits. Jesus tells Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree (1,48). This apparently trivial detail, which seems to have no other narrative purpose, is one indicator to the reader that

<sup>15</sup> Rylaarsdam, „Weeks, Feast of,“ 828; E. Lohse, *pentēkostē*,“ *TDNT*, 4. 44-53.

<sup>16</sup> M. Tsevat, „*b<sup>e</sup>khôr*,“ *TDOT*, 2. 122-23.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Trever, „Fig Tree, Fig,“ *IDB*, 2. 267.



the evangelist may be working with symbolism, that is to say, the meaning of this detail is to be found beyond the actual narrative.<sup>18</sup> The statement has been interpreted in various ways: Nathanael was studying the Torah;<sup>19</sup> Jesus' extraordinary knowledge indicates his ability as a wonder worker.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding these other interpretations, the naming of the fig tree may be alluding to the festival of First Fruits, which takes its name from the early fig.

A second possible allusion is found in the name Nathanael which means God's gift. The feast of First Fruits celebrates God's gifts of the cereal harvest of the past seven weeks and involves giving to God the first fruits of the harvest. Whether speaking of God's gifts to Israel or God's gifts offered by Israel the name Nathanael, found only here and in 21,2,<sup>21</sup> possibly has a symbolic purpose relating to this festival of thanksgiving.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, following the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael (1,47-50) Jesus promises that the disciples will see greater things (1,50) and alludes to the vision of Jacob in Genesis 28. According to the book of Jubilees (44,1-6), it was in the third month, i.e. at the time of First Fruits, that Jacob recalled his dream at Bethel and experienced a further vision of God.<sup>23</sup> This passage from the Book of Jubilees

<sup>18</sup> In an article on Johannine symbolism Juan Leal (1960) offers four criteria that can indicate when the narrative has a symbolic as well as a literal meaning; (i) inconsequential details that seem to play no part in the narrative, (ii) a discourse set within the narrative of an event such that they are mutually illuminating, (iii) when the evangelist accentuates the importance of a person, who has no significant role in context, (iv) when later liturgical and Christian expressions are used. See, J. Leal, „El simbolismo histórico del IV Evangelio,“ *Estudios Bíblicos* 19 (1960) 329-348.

<sup>19</sup> „Rabbinic sources say that the sages sometimes studied the Torah under a fig tree, suggesting that Nathanael was under the fig tree perusing scripture and its messianic prophecies“: C. Koester, „Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51),“ *JSNT* 39 (1990) 23, 31 n. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Moloney, *John*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Most scholars consider chapter 21 to be an addition to the original Gospel, possibly added following the death of the Beloved Disciple; for discussion on this issue see Moloney, *John*, 546.

<sup>22</sup> See Leal's criteria noted above, n. 18: „when the evangelist accentuates the importance of a person, who has no significant role in context.“

<sup>23</sup> „And Israel took his journey from Haran from his house on the new moon of the third month... And Jacob remembered the dream that he had seen at Bethel, and he feared to go down into Egypt... And he celebrated the harvest festival of the first-fruits ... And on the sixteenth the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him: ‚Jacob, Jacob‘; and he said, ‚Here am I.‘ And He said unto him: ‚I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac;

makes quite explicit that the second vision of Jacob occurred during the Festival of First Fruits and specifically on the day of its celebration, the sixteenth of the third month, which according to Jubilees is the date when the Law was given to Moses (Jub 1,1-2).<sup>24</sup> Nathanael, already identified by Jesus in terms of his eponymous ancestor Jacob/Israel (1,47), recognises Jesus as „Son of God“ and „King of Israel“, and he is promised a further vision of greater things in words recalling the vision of Jacob at Bethel (1,50), a vision which by the first century was associated with First Fruits.

Can anything good come from Nazareth?

Within this introductory scene, Nathanael is given particular prominence, which may be explained in the light of my previous work on the Temple. The dialogue between Philip and Nathanael emphasizes the village of Nazareth, which is named twice (1,45, 46). This is the only place in the Gospel where the village of Nazareth is named and I draw attention to the fact that the Greek associates the place Nazareth with Joseph, „Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth“ (v. 45).<sup>25</sup> The link between Jesus and Nazareth I believe is reserved until it can be utilized in a rich, symbolic manner within the Passion narrative where Jesus is given the title, „Jesus the Nazarene“ (18,5, 7; 19,19). Nazareth and Nazarene both come from the Hebrew root NZR<sup>26</sup> which is the term found in Isaiah 11, translated as Branch. „A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots“ (Isa 11,1).<sup>27</sup> I maintain that the Fourth Gospel relates the Branch of Jesse, to the Branch of Zechariah who is named as the one to build the new Temple.

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fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation I will go down with thee, and I will bring thee up... ’ And Israel rose up from the Well of the Oath on the sixteenth of this third month“ (Jub 44,1–6). R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

<sup>24</sup> And it came to pass in the first year of the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt, in the third month, on the sixteenth day of the month, that God spake to Moses, saying: „Come up to me on the Mount, and I will give thee two tables of stone of the law and of the commandment, which I have written, that thou mayst teach them“ (Jub 1:1-2).

<sup>25</sup> *Iēsoun huion tou Iōsēph ton apo Nazaret.*

<sup>26</sup> This was confirmed in 1962 when excavations at Caesara found a Hebrew inscription of a family from Nazareth clearly showing that this word was spelt with the Hebrew letter □ (tz) and not the simpler □ (z), see J. Strange, „Nazareth,“ *ABD*, 4. 1050-51.

<sup>27</sup> See M. L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001) 171-74 for a more detailed discussion of these texts. An

Collect silver and gold from the exiles – from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah – who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold a man (c.f. John 19,5) whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he that shall build the temple of the LORD; he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne (Zech 6,10–13).

While in the Hebrew text the word translated ‚Branch‘ in Zechariah (*tzamah*) is not the same Hebrew word we find in Isaiah (*netzer*), bfirst century methods of exegesis it was possible to use these similar terms interchangeably and the evidence from Qumran shows that not only was it possible, but it was happening.<sup>28</sup> I believe that this uniquely Johannine wording, *Jesus the Nazarene*, deliberately exploits the double meaning of the term Nazarene as both the place associated with Jesus and as a symbolic title, ‚the Branch‘, that is found three times in the Passion Narrative (18,5, 8; 19,19). Pilate’s title (*titlon*) on the Cross is the final title ascribed to Jesus prior to the Resurrection. Jesus dies named as „Jesus the Nazarene“ indicating that he is the Branch, the builder of the new Temple. In the crucifixion, while „the Jews“ destroy one Temple, the Temple of his body, Jesus, the Nazarene/Branch, is simultaneously raising another Temple, fulfilling the promise of Zechariah and his own words „Destroy this Temple and in three days, I will raise it up“ (2,19).

In the discussion of the Festival of First Fruits, I made the association between the name of the feast in Hebrew (lit. early figs) and Nathanael being seen by Jesus

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article by H. P. Rürger makes a similar case for linking ‚Nazareth‘ with Isaiah 11,1 when examining the Synoptic usage in Matt 2,23; 13,54 and Mark 6,1. He makes no mention of the Johannine usage. See H. P. Rürger, „Nazareth/ Nazara/ Nazarēnos/ Nazōraios,“ *ZNW* 72 (1981) 257-63.

<sup>28</sup> In the scrolls (4 Q161 [4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> line 11, 18]) we find an interpretation of Isaiah 11,1-5 where, following the quotation from Isaiah, the text is given a sectarian explanation. The quotation of verse 1 follows the Hebrew text and uses *netzer* (branch). In the commentary on this verse, the term *netzer* is rendered ‚the shoot of David“ but uses the expression *tzamah* from Zechariah 6,12. See F. Garcia Martinez and E. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 1Qq-4Q273 (2 vols.; New York: Brill, 1997) 1. 316. For other examples of the interchange of *netzer* and *tzamah*, see 4QFlor col 1,11 which comments on 2 Sam 7,11 and 4QpGen col 5,3-4. See also the discussion of the ‚Branch‘ in Koester, „Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51),“ 23-24.

„under a fig tree“ (1,48). Craig Koester’s article on Messianic Exegesis offers a further association between the fig tree and the Old Testament, linking this to the prophecy of Zechariah and a messianic Branch. My previous work on the Johannine title „the Nazarene“ and its Christological significance in this Gospel supports Koester’s claim, which I now examine.

Koester proposes that Jesus’ statement about seeing Nathanael „under a fig tree“ recalls the vision found in a number of Old Testament passages of „every man under his vine and under his fig tree“ (1 Kgs 4,25; Mic 4,4; Zech 3,10; cf. 1 Macc 14,12). These passages he claims “are associated with the coming of the messianic figure who is called the „Branch“ in Zechariah 3,8-10.”<sup>29</sup>

Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, a man will call his neighbour under a vine and under a fig tree (*hypokatō sukēs*) (Zech 3,8-10).<sup>30</sup>

The context of the Zechariah passage „relates the image of one man calling another under a fig tree to the advent of a messianic ‚Branch‘ (*tzamah* 3,8), who was to build the temple and „bear royal honor“ (6,12–13).“<sup>31</sup> This is the same context found in the Gospel. Philip calls Nathanael, who is under a fig tree, to announce the arrival of Jesus, whom the narrative will reveal as the Messianic Branch of Zechariah, the Nazarene Temple builder. Koester’s analysis of Zechariah 3, and my work on the Nazarene title indicate that John’s theology of the cross is already present and shaping this passage describing the gathering of Jesus’ first disciples. Knowing the significance of the title, „Jesus the Nazarene“ adds particular irony to Nathanael’s disparaging response to Philip, „Can anything good come from Nazareth“ (1,46). In terms of this Gospel, everything comes from *the Nazarene*. As the Nazarene Temple-builder, Jesus brings his mission to completion, and in his death,

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<sup>29</sup> Koester, „Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51),“ 24.

<sup>30</sup> I follow Koester’s translation of v. 10.; „Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51),“ 24.

<sup>31</sup> Koester, „Messianic Exegesis and the Call of Nathanael (John 1.45-51),“ 25.

the Spirit is released on a new creation. Jesus, the Nazarene, is the ultimate gift of God, (nathan-el) for the salvation of the world (3,16).

Jacob's vision.<sup>32</sup>

The final verse of chapter one is directed to all the disciples and not simply Nathanael: „Amen, Amen, I tell you (plural). You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man“ (1,51). The allusion is to Jacob's dream:

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top (lit. head, *kephālē*) of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. And the LORD stood beside him (Gen 28,12-13).

When Jacob awoke from his dream, he took the stone, which he had used as a pillow, dedicated it and called the name of that place Beth-el, i.e. the house of God. In this promise, Jesus indicates to his disciples that they, like Jacob, will glimpse the divine world and the place of this revelation is to be the mysterious figure, the Son of Man.<sup>33</sup> Following an extensive study of this Johannine title, Moloney concludes that the title „Son of Man“ in the Fourth Gospel directs the reader to the cross and to the ultimate revelation of Jesus in his hour.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A number of scholars propose that this final verse is an addition to the Nathanael passage; see for example, J. H. Neyrey, „The Jacob Allusions in John 1,51,“ *CBQ* 44 (1982) 586-89; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible 29-29a; New York: Doubleday, 1966 and 1970) 1. 88-89. As Brown points out, whatever its original source or meaning, the issue is to make sense of it where it now stands.

<sup>33</sup> While there is general agreement that this verse alludes to Genesis 28,12 there is much discussion about the particular reference of the imagery; for a discussion of the rather complex interpretations based on rabbinic traditions see W. Loader, „John 1,50-51 and the ‚Greater Things‘ of Johannine Christology,“ in *Anfänge der Christologie: Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Paulsen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 257-60. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to read the imagery as an indicator that Jesus is the new place of revelation, without pressing the details.

<sup>34</sup> „The Son of Man revealed God to men and brought judgement to men through his presence, as a man, among them. The high point of this revelation and judgment took place on the cross“: F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 14; Rome: LAS, 1978) 213. This interpretation of the Son of Man expression as a distinctly earthly revelatory figure was re-iterated in a recent article where Moloney engages with other interpretations that have appeared in the past twenty years. See F. J. Moloney,

I have argued that one aspect of the revelation of the cross is the raising of the new House/hold of God in the community of disciples.<sup>35</sup> Some scholars understand that Jesus' promise to the disciples, that they will see greater things, is fulfilled in the episode at Cana,<sup>36</sup> or in the following ministry;<sup>37</sup> my understanding is that this promise is best fulfilled at the cross in the destruction of one Temple, and raising of the new Beth-el, House of God (2,19).

#### The Household of Disciples as the First Fruits of Jesus' Mission.

If my arguments above are correct, the fourth evangelist has described the initial gathering of Jesus' disciples within the Jewish liturgical context of the Festival of Weeks (First Fruits/Pentecost). Such a deliberate narrative ploy raises the question – what theological purpose could lie behind this strategy? What light can this Festival shed on the Johannine understanding of Jesus and his mission?

Pentecost, or as it was more commonly named, „the day of the First Fruits“ (Num 28,26; Exod 23,16; 34,22; Lev 23,17) became linked to the events of Sinai and one important feature of the Sinai covenant was the choice of Israel as God's special people. „Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples“ (Exod 19,5).<sup>38</sup> This choice gave Israel priority among the nations so Israel was called the first-born son of God (Exod 4,2; Jer 31,8). One of the Hebrew words for the first born (*bekhirah*) comes from the same root (*bkr*) as the word for first fruits (*bikkurim*).<sup>39</sup> The prophet Jeremiah describes Israel as the first (*re'shith*) of Yahweh's harvest (Jer 2,3) and this is

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„The Johannine Son of Man Revisited,“ in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. P. Maritz; BETL 184; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 202.

<sup>35</sup> Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 186-90.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *Gospel* 1. 83, 91; J. Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 186; R. M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005) 25.

<sup>37</sup> R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley Murray et al.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 106; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 294.

<sup>38</sup> Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, 59-61. Chennattu develops the theology of John 1,19–2,12 focusing on the theme of covenant and giving particular attention to 1,35-51.

<sup>39</sup> M. Tsevat, „*b<sup>e</sup>khôr*,“ *TDOT*, 2. 122.

translated as „the first-fruits“ of the harvest.<sup>40</sup> In the New Testament the image of the first fruits is applied to Jesus (1 Cor 15,20, 23), the Spirit (Rom 8,23) and also to the Christian community (Jas 1,18; Rev 14,4). The fourth evangelist may have placed the gathering of the disciples in the context of the Festival of Weeks-/Pentecost to exploit the imagery of the first fruits, which can be understood in two ways. In the pre-Easter time this first discipleship group is the first fruit of his mission, the first indication of a harvest still to come within the Gospel's narrative (c.f. 4,35-38), and, more significantly, the post-Easter household of disciples is the first-fruit of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The link between „First Fruits“ and the first discipleship group may explain why this Festival is placed here in the narrative, and not within the later sequence of the Jewish Festivals that we find in chapters 5-10.

On the third day: Cana

In his examination of the Cana miracle Moloney points out a number of differences between this miracle and a typical miracle story.<sup>41</sup> The request by the mother of Jesus is not immediately followed by the miracle, instead Jesus responds with what appears to be a rebuke leading to his mother's statement to the servants to „do whatever he tells you“ (2,5). The miracle story does not lead to a response of wonder and awe on the part of the onlookers, and the miracle concludes with a statement describing it as a ‚sign‘ in which Jesus manifested his glory (2,11). In departing from the standard form of a miracle story, the evangelist directs our attention elsewhere. The provision of abundant good wine is not the point of the narrative. It is a sign, an indicator of the identity of Jesus. The narrator also draws attention to the relationship between Jesus and his mother, albeit in a rebuke that appears to deny the relationship.<sup>42</sup> For the purposes of this study I draw attention to two aspects of the pericope, firstly, Jesus' action in providing wine for the wedding, and secondly the role of the mother of Jesus.

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<sup>40</sup> There is a relationship between the two terms, firstborn (*re'shith*) and first fruits (*bik-kurim*), which is not entirely clear but the two terms are paired on occasion (Exodus 23,19; 34,26; Ezek 44,30): See, Tsevat, „*b<sup>e</sup>khôr*“, *TDOT*, 2. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Moloney, *John*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> So Lee, „The effect of the rebuff is, at least in part, to direct the reader's attention to the mysterious ‚hour‘ (*hōra*) which, as we will later discover, signifies Jesus' exaltation on the cross.“ See, D. A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002) 144.

### i. *The Bridegroom*

Following the miracle, when the steward discovers the miraculously provided wine, he goes to the bridegroom and comments, „you have kept the good wine until now“ (2,10). His statement indicates that it was the role of the bridegroom to provide the wine thus unwittingly revealing Jesus' identity as the bridegroom. When the narrator comments that this was the first of his signs, the word ‚sign' is not simply a synonym for miracle.<sup>43</sup> In naming the action a sign, the reader may well ask, „a sign of what?“ „What is being signified in this event?“

The sign of Cana points to the deeper identity of Jesus. The episode begins by situating this event „on the third day“ and concludes with the statement that this was the first time Jesus „manifested his glory.“ The opening and closing phrases frame the pericope with allusions to Exodus 19, as discussed above. The covenanting God of Israel whose glory was once revealed at Sinai is now present in Jesus. In the prophetic literature one of the images of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that of a marriage, with God as Israel's bridegroom (Isa 62,5; Jer 2,2; Hos 2,16).<sup>44</sup> Here at Cana, Jesus comes to Israel as the covenanting bridegroom providing abundant wine.

### ii *Mother and Son*

One of the deeply puzzling aspects of the Cana episode is the sharp response Jesus makes to his mother when she indicates that the wine has run out; it reads literally, „What to me and to you?“ (2,4). In all its uses in the LXX<sup>45</sup> this statement has a corrective, if not harsh, tone in a situation „in which two parties have

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<sup>43</sup> „L'emploi du terme, sêmeion pour parler des miracles est un indice permettant de constater que le langage de Jean s'est enrichi d'un symbolisme présent dans tout L'Évangile.“ See, Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean*, 111. On the significance of ‚signs' as a witness to divine authorization see M.-É. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus: An essay in Johannine Christology* (trans. B. T. Viviano; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 55-59.

<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah 2,2-3 brings together the imagery of Israel as YHWH's bride and as the first fruits: „I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest.“

<sup>45</sup> Judges 11,12; 2 Sam 16,10; 19,22; 1 Kgs 17,18; 2 Kgs 3,13; 2 Chron 35,21. Similarly in the New Testament it has the negative sense „leave me alone“ (Matt 8,29; Mark 1,24; 5,7; Luke 4,34; 8,28).



nothing in common, or no relationship to each other.<sup>46</sup> The reply to his mother is strange, but then the puzzle deepens when Jesus acts in accordance with her wishes. The very strangeness of the expression draws the reader's attention to the relationship between Jesus and his mother and to the indication that this relationship is not significant now but will be in the future, when 'the hour' arrives.<sup>47</sup> Considering Jesus' subsequent actions in changing the water into wine, his words to his mother must be understood primarily as a narrative strategy directing the reader's attention not so much to this Cana scene, but to the future 'hour'. It is then that the relationship between Jesus and the woman, never named, but designated as 'woman' and 'mother' will be critical. The importance of her relationship as mother of Jesus, in this Gospel, will only be revealed in 'the hour'.

In addition to the unique title on the Cross, 'the Nazarene' discussed above, a second unique aspect of the Johannine crucifixion is the scene with the Beloved Disciple and the mother of Jesus.

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her to his own (*eis ta idia*). After this, knowing that now everything had been finished, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave down the spirit (*paredōken to pneuma*) (19,25b–30).

This scene is the highpoint of the Gospel. It is only after these words that Jesus' mission is finished and he announces in words echoing those used when God com-

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<sup>46</sup> A. H. Maynard, „TI EMOI KAI SOI,“ *NTS* 31 (1985) 584. For a discussion of its use in the LXX and the possible Semitism lying behind the expression, see J.-P. Michaud, „Le signe de Cana dans son contexte johannique,“ *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 18 (1962) 247–53.

<sup>47</sup> The theme of Jesus' 'hour' will develop across the narrative and take on a meaning related to the Passion, as the 'hour' of Jesus' death, exaltation and glorification (7,30; 8,20; 12,23, 27; 13,1; 17,1). The presence of the woman/mother at Cana and at the cross link these two scenes and require that the 'hour' named here be understood in terms of the Passion.

pletes the work of creation, “it is finished” (*tetalestai*) (19,30). Verses 26 and 27 hold the key to the Johannine interpretation of the Cross. They are the climax of the Passion and the resolution of so many puzzles that the reader has encountered in the narrative to this point.<sup>48</sup>

From the cross, Jesus alters the relationship between his mother and the beloved disciple standing below. The woman, his mother, becomes ‚mother’ to the Beloved Disciple, and the disciple becomes ‚son’ to the mother of Jesus (19,26-27). In becoming ‚son’ to the mother of Jesus, the disciple, becomes brother/sister to Jesus, and child of the one Jesus calls ‚Father’. This is the moment when, through the gift of the Spirit, discipleship becomes divine filiation in the Johannine perspective. Following this scene, when the Risen One appears to Mary Magdalene, he tells her, „Go to my brothers and sisters (*adelphoi*) and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God“ (20,17). The Hour of Jesus draws disciples into the Father’s House (Temple 2,16), now properly termed the Father’s Household (14,2). Another way of saying this is that the new Temple/Household of God is the Johannine community in whom the Risen Christ dwells through the mediation of the Spirit. The expression, „to his own“ (*eis ta idia*) (19,27) forms an *inclusio* with the Prologue which announced that Jesus „came to his own, (*eis ta idia*), but his own did not receive him“ (1,11). The prologue then continues with the promise that those who did receive him would be given „the power to become children of God“ (1,12). What was promised in the Prologue is now fulfilled at the Cross. Disciples have become children and the action of the Beloved Disciple redresses the rejection by his own, as he takes his mother „into his own“.

In the light of this scene at the cross, the apparent rebuke within the Cana episode can be understood as the narrative ploy to highlight the significance of the relationship between Jesus and his mother, but to direct the significance of this relationship away from Cana to the ‚hour’. At Cana, a miracle is performed and a sign is given; Jesus is revealed as the bridegroom and the disciples see his glory, but it is in ‚the hour’ that disciples are born anew and become children of God.

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<sup>48</sup> This scene, within its context in the passion narrative, is discussed in more detail in my earlier works which I summarize here as the critical lens through which I am undertaking this second reading of the Gospel; see M. L. Coloe, „The Nazarene King: Pilate’s Title as the key to John’s Crucifixion.“ In *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*. (ed. G. Van Belle. BETL. Louvain: KUL Press, 2007) 839-848.

also *God Dwells with Us*, 186–90.

From the cross, the Nazarene Temple-builder raises up the Father's house in the formation of the household of disciples-children of God.

At the conclusion of the Cana episode we read, „After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and sisters and his disciples (*adelphoi*); and they dwelt (*emeinan*) there for a few days“ (2,12). In this short comment, a household gathers around Jesus. This verse therefore not only continues the nuptial theme of Jesus the bridegroom, but in the form of a prolepsis anticipates the creation of the household at the Cross where the disciple is given to the Mother and the Mother is received by the disciple *eis ta idia*. With the arrival of the bridegroom and the wedding celebrations completed, the disciples are incorporated into the household of Jesus, dwelling with his mother and brothers and sisters.<sup>49</sup>

Conclusion:

With the introduction of John, who will be identified as the witness and friend of the bridegroom (3,29), the divine process announced in the Prologue, that believers will become children of God (1,12), is set in motion. The narrative structure and imagery suggests that these initial events occur within the liturgical context of Weeks/Pentecost, which celebrates the first fruits of the harvest. Within narrative time, these disciples are the first fruits of Jesus' mission but their discipleship suggests a model of the process of discipleship for future believers beyond narrative time. The promise of future visions and the reference to the Son of Man point ahead to the Easter experience thus drawing into the narrative post-Easter disciples. The narrative of Andrew, his unnamed companion, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, speaks to the gathering of future disciples as the first fruits of Easter.<sup>50</sup>

Following this introductory movement, these disciples celebrate a wedding wherein Jesus is identified as the real bridegroom who provides abundantly. In this experience the disciples recognise the glory of God once revealed in the covenant

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<sup>49</sup> For further discussion of the imagery of the Bridegroom see M. L. Coloe, „John Witness and Friend: Symbolism associated with John the Baptist,“ in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Figurative Language* (ed. Jörg Frey, Jan van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 319-32; also Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God*, chaps. 2 and 3.

<sup>50</sup> In her study of this scene Chennattu („On becoming Disciples,“ 489) notes the many verbs that are future oriented, that have the character of a promise, „you shall see (v. 39),“ „you shall be called Peter (v. 42),“ „You will see heaven opened ... (v. 51).“

of Sinai, and now, in a festival celebrating that covenant, revealed in Jesus. The covenanting God of Sinai, whose relationship with Israel is often described in terms of a wedding, is now present in Jesus. The disciples move from the wedding feast and are gathered into Jesus' household with his mother and his siblings. The bridal theme continues in the following pericope where Jesus and his disciples go to the Temple, which Jesus names „My father's house“. According to ancient wedding customs, the bridegroom and bride took up residence in „the father's house“, becoming part of that household.

The first time reader may perceive some of the more explicit images across these chapters, such as marriage as a symbol of the covenant and Jesus the provider of wine as the bridegroom. A second-time reader, who knows the gospel narrative and reads in the light of Easter under the guidance of the Paraclete (14,26) is invited to perceive not just the story of Jesus' disciples, but their own story of coming to dwell within the Father's house/hold.

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