

Dear friends,

As many of you know, we are exploring Jesus' life as told by the author of the Gospel of John. This Gospel presents Jesus a little differently. Jesus is said to speak of himself in ways that we don't find in Matthew, Mark or Luke and the stories he tells are longer. In the other Gospels, Jesus tells more parables, stories that invite the hearer to think and reach an understanding. In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself is the parable.

There is much poetry and mystical language in John and there are also passages and words used that can be troubling. Unfortunately, John's use of "the Jews" as the enemy of Jesus has been used over the centuries for horrible treatment of Jewish people at the hands of Christians over the centuries. Those days are hardly far behind us as some of these texts were used in support of the Nazi Holocaust. As you read John, please remember that Jesus and his followers were Jewish. The faith community that John writes to and for has been kicked out of the synagogue as the tensions between followers of Jesus and non-followers, particularly after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, heated up. We will read the texts with "Jewish leaders" or "Jewish religious leaders" to help clarify and avoid an anti-Jewish reading of the text.

The texts of John has also been used to impose a certain orthodoxy in Christianity that don't ring true for many. Yet the beauty of the texts and the truths to be discovered therein remain appealing and mysterious. We, a group of followers that don't demand adherence to a creed, will explore the texts, seeking to gain knowledge of what God may be saying to us in these words and stories.

To aid in our journey, the Congregational UCC Library has acquired a copy of *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic* by John Shelby Spong. Spong is a leader in the progressive Christian movement and has been featured in many of the Living the Questions segments. I am currently reading this book and am finding it insightful. He helps to unpack the story, clarify and reclaim the Jewish roots inherent in the telling and gives much food for thought. I would encourage anyone interested in going deeper, to borrow our copy (or come by and curl up on a couch in the parlor).

**Looking forward to discerning more with you all.
Wishing you God's peace,
Pastor Lynn**