



You can be serious!

Checking out John
during Lent

by David Wilbourne

SPCK

York Courses

I have preached and led courses for forty Lents – a Lent of Lents! The different contexts I’ve ministered in and learned from as priest and bishop have seasoned my Lenten thoughts, along with a host of books I’ve read, written and reviewed.

Did the advent of Covid19 and subsequent lockdowns, though terrible, cause you to pause or undertake projects you’d never dreamt you’d have time for? I revisited the Maths and Further Maths A levels I’d studied as a teenager. It proved an all-consuming, enjoyable activity, but also brought me up short and made me determined to apply the academic rigour used by mathematicians in reflecting on my faith.

One thing Christians have in common is that every Sunday the same Gospel reading is used at their main act of worship. The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) sets out a three year cycle, with the five Sundays in Lent 2023 (Year A) featuring one reading from Matthew and four readings from John. John is often treated like a poor relative to the other three Gospels, with scholars doubting his historical veracity, so I thought it would be good to reflect on the previous Sunday’s Gospel and check John out. To lighten things I have drawn on favourite songs for the titles of each session – enjoy them on YouTube!

Anthony Bloom grew up in Russia and Iran at the time of the Russian revolution 100 years back. Like many adolescents dazzled by communism, he thought the Church was tired and hypercritical and was grossly misleading people. He decided to read Mark’s Gospel to arm himself to be the Richard Dawkins of his day. ‘By the third chapter sitting at the other side of my desk was a presence.’ The rest is history. Rather than taking on the Church, he was ordained and eventually became Moscow’s Archbishop.

As I researched John’s Gospel for this course, I too felt a presence, as if I was meeting Jesus again for the first time. I treated the text seriously, wanting to draw out its quirks and qualities, with my simple prayer that you too might meet Jesus afresh and make your own connections, enabling life in all its fullness.