

## Article

# Resurrection Preaching in the Gospel of John

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**Abstract:** The Gospel of John, without having its own liturgical year, is typically assumed to have a supplemental homiletical role in the Revised Common Lectionary, and yet the Fourth Gospel is the designated Gospel reading for the festival Sundays of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Easter season. As a result, the theological themes of the Fourth Gospel anchor the church's Trinitarian confessions and doctrinal imagination when it comes to preaching. In particular, as the assigned Gospel for the Sundays of Easter, the Gospel of John shapes resurrection proclamation. Resurrection proclamation, therefore, is animated by Jesus' final words to his disciples found in the Farewell Discourse (John 14–17), where Jesus interprets his own ministry, commissions his disciples, testifies to the Paraclete, and prays for his followers. This essay will explore how the viewpoint of Jesus' departing declarations makes a difference for preaching the resurrection. Through the lens of the Farewell Discourse, the promise of the resurrection takes on thematic issues that give important meaning to Jesus' own revelation, "I am the resurrection and the life".

**Keywords:** resurrection; Gospel of John; preaching; homiletics; trauma; Farewell Discourse

## 1. Introduction

Resurrection preaching is a special kind of homiletic. While Easter sermons typically address the empty tomb stories and the resurrection appearances found in the four Gospels, preaching on the resurrection of Jesus has never been restricted to Easter Sunday. The importance of resurrection hope finds unique significance in our various human contexts of dying and death, of destruction and catastrophe, and in the metaphorical deaths—our life circumstances of loss, diminishment, displacement, and oppression—where the resurrection promises new life.

Preaching on and about resurrection is always an embodied contextual matter. Shaped by liturgical, congregational, communal, national, and global circumstances, the implications of the resurrection get lived out in the situations of the listeners. That is, can resurrection preaching be effective when dislodged from an acute contextual need? General assertions about and arguments for the resurrection are best reserved for historical summaries and debates in systematic theology. The need for and nuances of resurrection preaching ascertained by a particular homiletical point in time is a decidedly pastoral determination.

At the same time, resurrection preaching also demands attention to narrative contextuality. The literary context gives interpretive and sermonic specificity for the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. A sermon on the resurrection accounts in Matthew (Matt 28:9–10, 16–20) should not sound the same as a sermon on Luke, Mark, John, or Paul. A resurrection sermon on Mark is more accurately a sermon about an empty tomb, for those who take Mark 16:8 as the original ending of that Gospel, and not about a resurrection appearance, Mark 16:9–18 notwithstanding; preachers must wrestle with what the empty tomb has to say about the promises of the resurrection.

Of course, preaching the resurrection of Jesus is not limited to the obvious, the resurrection narratives. Allusions to and foreshadowings of Jesus' resurrection also provide sources for homiletical reflection on Jesus' resurrection. For example, "lifted up" in John 3:14–15, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life", refers not only to



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Jesus being lifted up on the cross, but also the resurrection and the ascension (cf. 8:28; 12:32). The passion predictions in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 6:21; 17:22–23; 21:18–19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; Luke 9:22, 43b–44; 18:31–33) anticipate both Jesus' suffering on the cross and his resurrection. Metaphorical depictions of new life or new creation might also anticipate, underscore, or be interpreted by the resurrection promises (John 12:24). Even Jesus' resurrection miracles—the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17); Jairus's daughter (Matt 9:16–29, 23–26; Mark 5:21–24, 35–43; Luke 8:40–42, 49–56); and Lazarus (John 11:1–44)—confirm Jesus' power and authority to raise the dead ([Anderson 2013](#)). Exploring how these examples contribute to an understanding of the resurrection promises necessitates paying attention to their specific literary contexts, as they are outside of the resurrection narratives proper.

On the whole, however, the resurrection accounts found in the four Gospels provide the homiletical basis for most resurrection preaching. In the Revised Common Lectionary, the designated Gospel lesson for Easter Sunday is always John 20:1–18, with the alternative lection option from the three Synoptic Gospels depending on the lectionary year (Year A, Matthew; Year B, Mark; Year C, Luke). The Fourth Gospel has a unique role in the Revised Common Lectionary. While John does not have its own liturgical year, portions of John's Gospel anchor the festival or feast Sundays of the church—Christmas, Easter, Pentecost—thereby bending the theological tenets of the church toward John's theological particularity. In lectionary years B and C, the Gospel lesson for Trinity Sunday is also from John (Year B, John 3:1–17; Year C, John 16:12–15). Of the four Gospels, the Gospel of John has the most resurrection appearances, with two entire chapters dedicated to four resurrection stories. Furthermore, in the Revised Common Lectionary, selections from Jesus' Farewell Discourse are the assigned Gospel readings for the fifth, sixth, and seventh Sundays after Easter. Chapters 13–17 in John's Gospel narrate Jesus' last night with his disciples before his arrest. Chapter 13 focuses on the foot-washing (13:1–17), Judas's betrayal (13:18–30), and the foretelling of Peter's denial (13:36–38). Chapters 14–16 make up the Farewell Discourse proper, punctuated by the promise of the Paraclete. Chapter 17 is widely known as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer where he prays for himself (17:1–5), his disciples (17:6–19), and followers yet to be because of the disciples' witness in the world (17:20–26). John's Passion Narrative (18:1–19:42) is always the designated Gospel for Good Friday.

Chronologically, the Farewell Discourse takes place before Jesus' resurrection. Time stands still in these chapters, both anticipating and postponing the events of Jesus' Passion, yet also interpreting Jesus' earthly ministry, and foreshadowing the resurrection. Heard in the liturgical season of Easter, Jesus' Farewell Discourse expands the meaning of Jesus' resurrection in foundational ways. Resurrection preaching on the Gospel of John should ask how Jesus' last words interpret the meaning of his resurrection before the resurrection takes place.

The aim of the discussion that follows is to demonstrate how the Farewell Discourse is essential in grasping both the homiletical implications of Jesus' resurrection in the Gospel of John and the understanding of Jesus' resurrection in general. John includes four resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples that are preceded by an empty tomb story. Mary Magdalene is the first one to discover Jesus' missing body which she then reports to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved (20:1–2). The two disciples set off for the tomb to validate Mary Magdalene's news, finding the tomb empty along with the burial cloths left behind. The disciple whom Jesus loved seems to believe that Jesus has overcome death but neither he nor Simon Peter yet understand the full meaning of Jesus' resurrection (20:3–10). The encounter in the garden between the resurrected Jesus and Mary Magdalene is the first resurrection appearance (20:11–18). The second appearance of the resurrected Jesus is to the disciples as they are locked behind closed doors (20:19–23). Jesus then comes to the disciples a week later for the benefit of Thomas (20:24–31), the third resurrection appearance. The fourth resurrection appearance finds the disciples meeting the resurrected Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee while they have gone back to their day job of fishing (21:1–19).

Each resurrection appearance gains greater meaning and homiletical possibility with the Farewell Discourse in mind. Without the Farewell Discourse, preaching the resurrection in John's Gospel would result in a diminished view of its resurrection promises and possibilities. When the last words of Jesus to his disciples are brought forward as backdrop for interpreting the resurrection stories, five resurrection themes come into view that are integral for preaching on the Gospel of John.

In the Gospel of John, the resurrection also stands as Jesus' own self-revelatory claim. The promise of Jesus to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25) in the story of the death and raising of Lazarus is the subject of much exegetical debate. Text-critical research has shown that in some of the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John, "and the life" has been omitted (Brown 1966, pp. 424n25, 434). Scholars of the Johannine corpus have argued that for the Fourth Evangelist, "resurrection" and "life" are synonymous, that the addition "and the life" is repetitive, or, that the omission was intended to correspond with 11:24, which does not include "life". Internal narrative evidence shows, however, that "and the life" is the element of Jesus' resurrection that is susceptible to misinterpretation. A narrative pattern in the Fourth Gospel centers on the interpretation of the signs that Jesus performs. The structure of sign, dialogue, discourse can be found in chapter five for the healing of the man unable to walk for thirty-eight years (5:1–47), chapter six and the feeding of the five thousand (6:1–71), and the healing of the man born blind (9:1–10:21). Expected, therefore, is the same blueprint for Jesus' last sign, the raising of Lazarus: Jesus executes the sign, there is then dialogue concerning the possible meanings of the sign, which is followed by Jesus' own interpretation of the sign. Never designated as miracles but rather signs in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' incredible acts call for explanation as to what they reveal or point to about Jesus. In the raising of Lazarus, the pattern is reversed with the sign, Lazarus coming out of the tomb, at the end, following the dialogue and discourse about the sign. As Jesus' last sign in the Gospel before his entry into Jerusalem, it is the one sign that risks misinterpretation because of its anticipation of Jesus' own resurrection—and what his resurrection means for believers. Jesus' self-identification, "I am the resurrection and the life", should call for preaching that takes seriously its ontological claim. The conclusion of the essay will suggest that through the perspective of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' revelation, "I am the resurrection and the life", gains deeper theological meaning, realized as both future assurance and the present promise of abundant life.

## 2. Resurrection Themes in the Gospel of John

In what follows, five resurrection themes that run through the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel are discussed: Resurrection as Trauma; Resurrection as New Creation in the Spirit; Resurrection as Relationship Remembered; Resurrection as Peace; and Resurrection as Promise of the Ascension.

### 2.1. Resurrection as Trauma

Jesus' words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" open the Farewell Discourse (14:1). The reason for the disciples' troubled hearts is not only Jesus' impending departure but also incidents that have already occurred in Jesus' last night with his disciples. His hour has come (13:1), which represents the ensuing events of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Before Jesus shares with his disciples about what will unfold, he acknowledges their troubled hearts because of what they have already been through: Judas's betrayal (13:18–30) and the prediction of Peter's denial (13:36–38). After having his feet washed by Jesus and sharing a meal with his fellow disciples, Judas is possessed by Satan and exits the room in which the disciples and Jesus are gathered, where "and it was night" indicates that Judas has chosen darkness over the light of the world (see 3:19). Judas's abandonment of Jesus and his fellow disciples recalls the first reference to Judas in the Gospel of John, "'But among you there are some who do not believe'. For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him" (6:64). For the Gospel of John, the betrayal of Judas occurs when Judas

rejects a relationship with Jesus on the last night Jesus has with his disciples and not at the arrest of Jesus. Judas does not hand Jesus over and there is no kiss of Jesus from Judas. Instead, Jesus freely gives himself up to the authorities: “Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’” (18:4) and “So if you are looking for me, let these people go” (18:8). Betrayal, as we have already been told, is not to believe in Jesus, which for John means choosing not to be in a relationship with Jesus (Koester 2008, pp. 161–62; O’Day and Hylen 2006, pp. 14–15). The unsettling news of Judas’s exit is further intensified by the real-time narration of the scene. Once the disciples hear Jesus’ words, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me”, Jesus himself being troubled in spirit (13:21), they then look around at each other, wondering who it could be (13:21–22). One of their very own will no longer be with them. After Jesus’ command to love one another immediately following Judas’s betrayal, Jesus then foretells Peter’s denial, prompted by Peter’s poignant inquiry, “Lord, where are you going?” (13:36). Surrounding the love commandment, therefore, is Judas’s betrayal and Peter’s denial. What loving one another will mean is set against the backdrop of Jesus washing the feet of his betrayer and his denier.

The experience of Judas’s betrayal and Peter’s denial emphasizes the distressing reality of Jesus’ own departure: the disciples will now hear Jesus’ parting words through these two realities. As the rest of the Farewell Discourse unfolds, the reasons for having troubled hearts grow as Jesus talks. All of Jesus’ references to his leaving and what the disciples will then face build upon the desertion of two of their friends. Before the resurrection becomes promises fulfilled, it is first wrapped up in the disturbing events of Jesus’ last night with his disciples. Judas has left and Peter will abandon Jesus. The discovery of the empty tomb is not immediately understood as resurrection glory, neither by Mary Magdalene nor by Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Against the backdrop of chapters 13–17, the empty tomb appears to signal the ultimate abandonment by Jesus himself of those who had followed him and believed in him. Jesus’ absent body calls to mind the absence of friends and calls into question Jesus’ own words of promise. For Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, they cannot know the fullness of the resurrection even though the emptiness of the tomb points to Jesus’ victory over death. Instead, their discovery of the empty tomb would take them back to their last night with Jesus, for Simon Peter, his denial, and for the Beloved Disciple being at the foot of the cross. All of these past details are brought forward to John’s empty tomb story, so that resurrection is, first, trauma recalled (Lewis 2023, pp. 117–31). The trauma experienced by Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple is underscored by Mary Magdalene’s meeting with Jesus in the garden. Having also been at the foot of the cross (19:25), her finding Jesus’ empty tomb would have been for her trauma upon trauma. She goes to the tomb, not to anoint Jesus’ body for burial because Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have already done so, but to visit the grave of her loved one, as mourners do. The four references to her weeping further underscore her despair, and Mary’s inability to recognize Jesus is indicative of trauma (Lewis 2023, pp. 124–25). In her trauma, Mary Magdalene cannot integrate her past knowledge with her present experience, also characteristic of trauma (Rambo 2010, p. 83). When Jesus appears to the disciples, he finds them terrified, huddled together behind the safety of locked doors. It is not Jesus’ blessing of peace that elicits their response of joy but seeing the wounds in his hands and feet (20:20). The trauma of the crucifixion is real, so that Jesus’ bodily presence can be real as well.

Through the lens of the Farewell Discourse, the resurrection narratives can be seen as trauma narratives. Before Easter Sunday is celebration and rejoicing in seeing the Lord, it is invited space to respond to the trauma of violent death—and the tragic deaths in our own lives. Resurrection is an enfleshed story of the grief and loss that is a part of human existence, even for those who anticipate the fulfillment of resurrection promises. The last words of Jesus to his disciples in the Farewell Discourse give additional meaning and substance to this element of the resurrection appearances, a dimension that would otherwise go unnoticed if a preacher focuses on the resurrection passages alone. Preaching

the resurrection becomes a holding space where trauma is acknowledged, named, and remembered as inherent to the human condition and yet also where hope in God abounds (Travis 2021, p. 59). A sermon on the resurrection stories in the Gospel of John, therefore, acknowledges and affirms the real experiences of our own reactions to trauma and the incomprehensiveness of death.

## 2.2. Resurrection as New Creation in the Spirit

A primary feature of the Farewell Discourse is the formal introduction of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel. While there have been references to the Spirit previously (1:32–33; 3:5–6, 8, 34; 4:23–24; 6:63; 7:39; 11:33), it is in the Farewell Discourse that John introduces a pneumatology unique to the Fourth Gospel. There are five references to the promised Advocate scattered throughout the Farewell Discourse: 14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7b–11, 12–15). Distinctive to John's Gospel is the term *paraklētos*, which means "one who is called alongside". While most translations render the term as "Advocate", other possibilities include "helper", "comforter", "aide", "intercessor", and "companion". When Jesus first mentions the Paraclete, he does so in connection with an understanding of his own ministry and the time he has spent with his disciples the past three years: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (14:16). Jesus casts a view of his ministry as one who has accompanied the disciples, just as now the Paraclete will do in his absence. The specific roles of the Paraclete recall the features of Jesus ministry. The Paraclete will abide (14:17); teach and remind (14:26); testify (15:26); convict the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:7–11); guide into all truth, declare things to come, and glorify Jesus (16:13–15).

The fundamental role and purpose of the Paraclete is to function as the presence of Jesus in his absence. This absence will occur because the events of the hour—Jesus' arrest, trial, and eventual crucifixion—have been set in motion, but even the resurrection will not and cannot fill the void. For John, the resurrection is the penultimate promise, with the ascension being the final act of grace upon grace (1:16) enacted for the world God loves (3:16). Jesus must return to the Father for God's love made flesh to come full circle. But Jesus will not leave his disciples orphaned (14:18). The gift of the Spirit will be the source of comfort after Jesus' departure once again in the ascension.

Through the lens of the pneumatology laid out in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' gift of the Spirit to the disciples at the second resurrection appearance takes on new significance (20:22). The giving of the Spirit fulfills every promise of Jesus in the Farewell Discourse, connecting pneumatology and resurrection. The future resurrected life is thus not only ensured in Jesus' own resurrection, but also affirmed as a present reality by the accompaniment of the Spirit. The Spirit's companionship reminds the disciples of both Jesus' ministry and the ongoing presence of the resurrected Jesus.

The actual giving of the Holy Spirit in John recalls believers' new birth as children of God (1:12–3; 3:3). Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples, the same verb used (*emphusaō*) in the Septuagint for God's inbreathing of God's very breath into the first human, "Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). It evokes also Ezekiel's vision of the revival of the dry bones, "Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live'. I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude" (Ezek 37:9–10).

Resurrection is inextricably linked with the accompaniment of the Paraclete. The resurrection as the promised presence of the Spirit places the meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection in the here and now and not in a postponed reunion with God and Jesus. The reception of the Spirit from the resurrected Jesus also connects Jesus' resurrection with the foundational promise of the Gospel of John, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"



(3:16). The disciples are sent into the world to carry out the works of God (14:12; 15:8): “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21). After 20:22, there is no further mention of the Spirit because it now abides in the disciples and accompanies them. Resurrection preaching that calls attention to the presence and promise of the Paraclete invites imagination around the implications of the resurrection beyond Easter Sunday. The meaning of the resurrection is then not located in a single event but lived out in the creative action of believers in the world. Preaching then “ushers in breath” (Powery 2012, p. 81) as daily embodiment of the resurrection promise. For the contemporary listener, the connection between resurrection and the gift of the Spirit invites imagination around the meaning and function of the Spirit in the daily life of faith.

### 2.3. Resurrection as Relationship Remembered

Each of the resurrection appearances is an affirmation of relationship between Jesus and the character(s) in the narrative, a relationship potentially broken because of the unknown of the resurrection. For Mary, the disciples, Thomas, and Peter, Jesus meets them in their fear of being forever separated from Jesus. Jesus comes to Mary in her double trauma of having witnessed Jesus’ death on the cross (19:25) and then discovering that the tomb is empty. Mary Magdalene watched Jesus die, and at the garden tomb, she believes Jesus’ body has been stolen. Yet, when Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by name, as the good shepherd calls his sheep by name (10:3), the intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary is affirmed. It is in that moment that she is able to recognize Jesus, when she hears the voice of her good shepherd as one of Jesus’ own fold and flock known by, cared for, and protected by him. Resurrection is relationship remembered with the good shepherd before it is any kind of creedal claim about salvation or what the resurrection even means. Mary Magdalene’s announcement to Jesus’ disciples confirms this realization, that her relationship with Jesus is intact: “I have seen the Lord!” She neither declares what Jesus asked her to say, “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (20:17), nor does she announce the resurrection, “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” For her, resurrection is first and foremost relationship renewed with her teacher and Lord. Mary Magdalene’s address of Jesus also underscores this recognition. In calling Jesus “Rabbouni”, a form of endearment, she also confirms her own identity as one of Jesus’ disciples: he is her teacher, and she is his disciple. Their relationship is still true, not reestablished or reinstated, but a remembering of Jesus’ promises to her and who she knows herself to be. Through the lens of the resurrection, Mary reflects on the past and believes in the Truth (14:6).

When Jesus appears to the disciples in their seclusion and fear, they repeat the words of Mary: “We have seen the Lord” (20:25). The promises of Jesus’ presence and relationship with them come to fruition in his breathing of the Holy Spirit into them. Before resurrection is cast as a foretaste of the future, it is relationship remembered. This relationship is also confirmed by Jesus’ words, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21). At the first calling of the disciples and as they follow Jesus, early on they are commissioned to carry out the love of God for the world and fulfill the apostolic vision of the Gospel (10:16). Jesus takes them to Sychar, in Samaria, to find a witness in the woman at the well. With her testimony to her townspeople, Jesus offers her as a model of witness to his disciples. When Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (4:34–35), he is telling his disciples to follow in her footsteps. They are to “go into the fields” and invite others to “come and see”. For the disciples, the encounter with the resurrected Jesus is cause to remember the relationship they experienced as his followers, a relationship that will now send them into the world to embody God’s love for the world.

For Thomas, his request to see Jesus’ wounds is neither a demand for proof nor indicative of his skepticism or doubt. Thomas needs what has already been possible for Mary Magdalene and for his fellow disciples—in seeing Jesus, his relationship with Jesus

will be confirmed. Thomas's words, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (20:25), should be interpreted in light of John's overall presentation and understanding of "belief". In the Fourth Gospel, to believe is synonymous with being in a relationship with Jesus. A paraphrase of Thomas's request might sound something like, "For me to know that my relationship with Jesus still endures, I need to see him, just as the rest of you have". Moreover, the encounter between Thomas and Jesus would have Thomas recalling his question of Jesus in the Farewell Discourse: "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'" (14:5). Jesus' appearance to Thomas embodies Jesus' response to Thomas's plea, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (14:6) and responds to Thomas's needs point for point, offering Thomas everything for which he asked. Because of Jesus' presence to and for Thomas, Thomas's confession, "my Lord and my God" is both confirmation that the relationship is intact, and realization that this relationship has its fullest expression in the oneness with God and Jesus (cf. 17:10).

On the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the risen Jesus finds the disciples as they have returned to their occupation of fishing. At first not able to recognize Jesus, the disciples then realize that it is Jesus with their abundant catch of fish, "It is the Lord!" (21:7). After sharing breakfast together with the disciples, Jesus and Peter have their own intimate conversation. This is not Peter's restorative moment after his denial of Jesus and Jesus does not blame, shame, or forgive Peter. In the Gospel of John, Peter had not denied knowing Jesus, as happens in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:70–74; Luke 22:57; cf. Mark 14:68;). Instead, Peter denies his own identity as one of Jesus' disciples, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not" (18:17; see also 18:25–27). In denying his discipleship, Peter not only disavows that he is a disciple of Jesus but also rejects the fact that to be a disciple of Jesus is first and foremost to abide in an intimate relationship with Jesus. As a result, Jesus' words to Peter are an affirmation of the mutual relationship between them. Jesus now needs Peter to be the good shepherd in the world because Jesus is ascending to the Father.

In the case of all four resurrection appearances in John 20–21, underscoring the grief of the empty tomb and the misunderstanding of the meaning of the resurrection is the acute reality of a broken relationship, or separation from Jesus, which so much of the Farewell Discourse communicates. Even with the promise of the Paraclete to accompany the disciples as Jesus did (John 14:15–17), the tone of the Farewell Discourse is laden with fear, troubled hearts, misunderstanding of where Jesus is going, and separation anxiety. The chapters hold simultaneously the truths of Jesus' departure and his seeing the disciples again, but it is the unknowing and misunderstanding of where Jesus is going that holds sway. With the Farewell Discourse in mind, there is more homiletical insight into the resurrection appearances as individual encounters with Jesus that lead to remembering Jesus' promises of relationship with them and an embodied affirmation of Jesus' promises. Before Jesus' resurrection is the future promise of resurrected life with him, it is the confirmation that the relationship has not been and never will be broken. Resurrection is not a gap in the relationship with Jesus between incarnation and eternal life. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus is that which ensures that there will be no interruption. With the Farewell Discourse in view, the fundamental human fear of loss of relationship that occurs in death is then acknowledged. When preachers name the resurrection narratives as stories that mirror our own fears of abandonment, especially in death, the resurrection is then affirmation of memory that lives on in the present. For today's listeners, hearing the promise of resurrection as relationship remembered encourages them to recall and give voice to how those relationships have shaped them and their faith today.

#### 2.4. Resurrection as Peace

Through the lens of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' resurrection greeting of "Peace be with you" (20:19, 21, 26) takes on additional meaning and significance. Three times, the

resurrected Jesus greets his disciples with “Peace be with you”, a salutation absent from the resurrection account in Matthew (28:9–10). Luke’s resurrection narratives include one instance of this exchange, “While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (Luke 24:36); yet, here in John, “Peace be with you” is lacking in a number of ancient manuscripts. For Luke, Jesus’ greeting initiates a response of fear: “They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (Luke 24:37). In John, however, hearing “Peace be with you” would have recalled Jesus’ words of peace from the Farewell Discourse, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (14:27), and “I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!” (16:33). In the first instance, words of peace follow Jesus’ initial forecasts of his departure: “And you know the way to the place where I am going” (14:4); “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live” (14:18–19); “I have said these things to you while I am still with you” (14:25).

In the anticipation of his absence, Jesus will leave his disciples with peace and is the source of peace. The last verse of the Farewell Discourse before the High Priestly Prayer (16:33) suggests that it is in Jesus that peace is possible. When these promises of peace assuming Jesus as its source and being are recalled in the second and third resurrection appearances in John, Jesus is peace embodied that is now with the disciples (Lewis 2014, p. 245). Peace is not an abstract concept or mere contentment (Kysar 2002, pp. 158–60), or that which necessarily assuages fear, but Jesus’ very presence among them. It is the relationship the disciples have with Jesus that is peace itself. Jesus’ resurrection in John, therefore, is interconnected with the experience of peace, where peace means Jesus’ promise of his presence fulfilled. In the mutual interpretive possibilities between the Farewell Discourse and the resurrection appearances, both the concept of peace and the peace that resurrection brings take on new homiletical potential. Preachers proclaim the peace known because of the resurrection not as erasure of disturbance but as the presence of love and friendship known in Jesus in the midst of unrest. In this good news, listeners might imagine their own role as beacons of peace when all that stands against peace seems to prevail (Campbell 2002, p. 156).

### 2.5. Resurrection as Promise of the Ascension

While never narrated in John as it is in the Gospel of Luke (24:50–53) and in Acts (1:6–11), the ascension of Jesus is assumed throughout John’s Gospel as the completion of the work of Jesus. Jesus’ return to the Father is a return from whence he came (1:1; 16:28). Jesus speaks about the ascension in his public ministry: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13); “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” (6:62). References to Jesus’ ascension in the Farewell Discourse are oblique, especially when compared to the verses noted above and Jesus’ plain instruction to Mary Magdalene, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). But there can be no doubt that for the Fourth Gospel, Jesus’ reunion with the Father is the culminating act of his mission and ministry in the world.

In the first verses of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus shares with his disciples that he is going to a place where they cannot follow immediately (13:36), yet they know the way thither (14:4). Thomas objects, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:5). Woven throughout the Farewell Discourse are Jesus’ words about his departure that are connected with a reunion with God, his Father: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live” (14:18–19); “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you’. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going



to the Father, because the Father is greater than I" (14:28): "But now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts" (16:5–6); "A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me" (16:16); "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father" (16:28). The end of the Farewell Discourse finds the disciples in much confusion: "We do not know what he is talking about", (16:18). Even in the High Priestly Prayer (chapter 17), which the disciples in John overhear, the ascension is assumed: "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you" (17:11); "But now I am coming to you" (17:13). The Farewell Discourse encapsulates Jesus' departure in the arrest and crucifixion, but the ascension will also mean his leave-taking, which the resurrection will bring about.

In the resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden, Jesus asks her to announce not the resurrection, but the ascension: "Jesus said to her, 'Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father'. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (20:17). The entirety of the promises of Jesus' departure made to the disciples in the Farewell Discourse are now summarized in Jesus' instructions to Mary Magdalene. Without the ascension, the resurrection promises will not be fulfilled. Through the viewpoint of the Farewell Discourse, the resurrection itself becomes a sign of grace upon grace (1:16), pointing to abundance beyond even the empty tomb and Jesus' presence. The resurrection is not the end; rather, it secures the promises of abundant life (10:10) into an always unfolding future (21:25).

Without the Farewell Discourse and the anticipation of the ascension, Jesus' words about eternal life become located in the resurrection alone. For John, eternal life cannot be positioned on a timeline or connected to a particular action of Jesus, even those of the resurrection and the ascension, but gets recast as relationship unbound by chronology. The life that Jesus offers is none other than shared union with him and with God and, thus, without the ascension, the resurrection has the potential to leave unity with Jesus and God unfilled. As Jesus' ascension is an infrequent topic in preaching, true only in part because of liturgical constraints, its theological centrality in the Fourth Gospel, and in the Acts of the Apostles for that matter, invites homiletical imagination about the ascension beyond creedal statements that focus on Jesus' heavenly authority. Preaching the ascension, therefore, becomes another means by which believers envision the fullness of a relationship with Jesus and with God. Crafting a resurrection sermon with the ascension in full view attends to this fundamental Christian belief yet through a pastoral lens.

### 3. Conclusions

The life that Jesus offers through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension is bound up in the entirety and necessity of all four of these purposes of Jesus' mission and ministry. Having the Farewell Discourse in mind is an important corrective to resurrection perspectives that would locate the abundant life that Jesus offers only in an empty tomb or an encounter with the risen Christ.

At the beginning of the Gospel, life is possible because of the word becoming flesh: "Without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life" (1:3–4). In Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension is the promise of eternal life, which he gives to all, given to him (17:2), defined clearly in the High Priestly Prayer, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3). The promise of eternal life is situated in Jesus' own life and ministry, not directly connected only to his resurrected life (cf. 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50). Resurrection, therefore, can be understood as promises kept rather than heavenly predictions of life to come.

Homiletically, four implications follow from the conclusions argued above. Before noting these results however, some observations about the narrative tone of the Farewell Discourse are in order. That is, what difference does it make that the words of the Farewell

Discourse are Jesus at his pastoral best? When the resurrection appearances recall the Farewell Discourse, this suggests that preaching the resurrection should first take on a pastoral stance. As discussed in Section 2.1 *Resurrection as Trauma*, before the stories of Jesus' resurrection were seen as God's vindication over death, they were stories about loss, grief, and trauma. How we give space for death, especially when liturgically, many will not have witnessed Jesus' death, needs to be a part of the Easter sermon. There are pastoral consequences in making interpretive connections between the Farewell Discourse and the resurrection stories. Providing homiletical space for grief and loss, especially around death, is a critical counter move in a society that tends to stave off or ignore death.

A first homiletical implication is that when resurrection preaching in the Gospel of John takes into account the Farewell Discourse, the encounters with the resurrected Jesus are then not simply appearances of proof of the resurrection. Recognizing the resurrected Jesus is simultaneously a recognition of self, identity, and discipleship. The resurrection of Jesus means more than the promise of an empty tomb. It means an invitation for Jesus' followers to live out the promises of eternal life here and now, a calling come to fruition. For preaching, this invites embodying one's belief in Jesus as daily acts of mutuality. Resurrection preaching summons an incarnated response to grace upon grace. Second, with the Farewell Discourse in view, resurrection is then not just an assumption of salvation or redemptive future glory. Resurrection is a call for preachers to testify to the life possible with Jesus in the present. It is not a third-person claim, distanced by denominational and liturgical constraints, but a first-person confession that makes oneness with God and Jesus the heart of resurrection preaching, "I have seen the Lord".

Third, through the lens of the Farewell Discourse, preaching resurrection can put forward new understandings of the resurrection of the body and the bodily and fleshly, human experiences of death and resurrection. Luke's resurrection stories suggest that resurrected life is an embodied life; that is, the resurrected Jesus is not a resuscitated cadaver or a ghostly soul (Luke 24:26–48). In John, however, the sense of resurrection as embodied existence means a mutual embodiedness of Jesus and believer. Followers of Jesus in the Gospel of John are changed and charged in their encounters with the resurrected Jesus. Resurrection is not a topic for belief, but the human condition of moving from fear to joy, experienced fully in our real bodies. For the preacher, then, this means encouraging believers not just to hope in the resurrection but to live out the resurrection, even when the resurrection promise still feels too close to grief. It calls for a homiletical honoring of bodies in our midst as just as worthy as care for the dead (Long 2009, p. 7).

Fourth, interpreting the resurrection appearances against the backdrop of Jesus' parting words to his disciples in the Farewell Discourse allows for Jesus' resurrection promises to be recognized in the everyday lives of believers and not just on Easter Sunday or during the Easter season. The interpretive mutual possibilities between the Farewell Discourse and the resurrection appearances suggest that resurrection promise is part and parcel of day-to-day faith and life. The unique Christian claim—that God raised Jesus from the dead—becomes a dynamic aspect of discipleship, theological conversation, and even perspectives of the world. As a result, resurrection preaching is made flesh in the lives of Jesus' followers.

Finally, through the perspective of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' claim, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25) gains fuller theological meaning. The connections between the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus have been well established (O'Day 1995, pp. 552, 841). The details surrounding this last sign in the Gospel of John foreshadow descriptions of Jesus' empty tomb, where the terminology for "head cloth" is the same in both stories (*soudarion*; 11:44 and 20:7). Whereas Lazarus exits the tomb bound, that Jesus has left behind his burial cloths (20:6–7) points to how Jesus' resurrection is different. With these connections in mind, the interaction between Jesus and Martha is the narrative moment when the full meaning of the resurrection can potentially be misunderstood. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (11:21–22).

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again”. The conclusions Martha makes about the raising of her brother hinge on this moment—how she will understand Jesus’ words, “your brother will rise again”. This is not a test or trap for Martha coming from Jesus. Rather, it is demonstrative of the function of misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel (Culpepper 1983, pp. 152–65). Jesus’ words are consistently misunderstood, in part to move the character(s) with whom he is speaking to a new level of recognition of Jesus’ identity (see 2:19–21; 3:3–9, 4:10–12; 6:51–58). Martha’s misunderstanding echoes the past moments of the same in the Gospel, “Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day’” (11:24). She expresses here nascent belief in the resurrection as a promise connected to the coming of the Messiah, “‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world’” (11:27). Resurrection, however, is not only a future promise because of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (14:2) but represents abundant life here and now in abiding with Jesus. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (11:25–26). This direct connection between resurrection and believing underscores how the Fourth Evangelist casts “believing” to express having a relationship with Jesus. Always a noun and never a verb, “to believe” leads to eternal life (cf. 3:15–16; 5:24; 20:31). “I am the resurrection and life” is the impossible call to imagine chronological collapse of now and later. Through the hearing of Jesus’ farewell words, the future is now and the present is a promise already fulfilled—a resurrected life known in abiding love.

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