

Why write? (John 20:19-31)

I'm struck by the boldness and clarity of the writer of John's Gospel.

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In *Why Write?* professor and author Mark Edmundson offers some provocative reasons:

- to catch a dream
- to make some money
- to get even
- to change the world
- to learn something
- to stay sane
- to see what happens next
- to stop revising
- to get better as you get older
- to have the last word

He lists many more reasons, but you get the idea. There are many reasons to write an email, an essay, a book, or anything else.

I've written for one or another of these reasons, often at the same time: to catch a dream, make a bit of money, change the world. Or to fail at such things, which is another reason Edmundson lists. Or to learn something and stay sane and finally stop revising.

Perhaps it's because my reasons are sometimes many and overlapping that I'm especially struck by the boldness and clarity of the writer of John's Gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Ancient manuscripts vary as to the grammar of this passage. Some use a verb tense that can be interpreted as "come to believe," suggesting that the Gospel was written for those who don't already believe. Other manuscripts use a different verb tense that can be interpreted as "continue to believe," suggesting that the Gospel was written for the church. Either way, the Gospel writer is unashamedly upfront about his purpose. He wants to convince and convict his readers in what he sees as their best interest: to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and so to gain life in his name.

A critic might dismiss John's Gospel as propaganda, as a selective version of events to promote a particular point of view. In Edmundson's list of reasons, I might locate the Gospel writer's purpose somewhere between writing to remember and writing to change the world, or at least writing to change readers' lives. Or maybe the Gospel writer's purpose fits with what Edmundson says about writing "to find beauty and truth."

In any case, I find myself challenged by the clarity of the Gospel writer's purpose. Do I write so that others might believe and continue to believe? Do you read with that kind of purpose? Whatever we write and read, whatever the issues, however vigorous our discussion and however we might agree or disagree, can we write and read with that kind of purposeful focus on Jesus?

Maybe that's too bold, too evangelistic. Or maybe, in a world of division and controversy, that's the only way we can share life together in Jesus' name.