

## John 1:29-42a – Epiphany 2 – Come and You Will See – January 15, 2023

+In Nomine Iesu+

John gives us a really intriguing look at Jesus' Baptism in our passage from his Gospel. And he does this without actually mentioning the Baptism. It's a clever move—maybe even a little humble. And he will do something similar with Holy Communion in John 6. We actually need the other Gospels to figure out what he is talking about. John knows that his Gospel needs Matthew, Mark, and Luke—just like they need him.

The Baptism of Our Lord was supposed to be celebrated last Sunday—we switched our focus to the Epiphany. And although this is the year of Matthew in our lectionary, every year we get a little bit of John peppered in.

And here I mean John the Evangelist—the Gospel writer—one of the Twelve. This John is not the same John as John the Baptist. But I guess you could say that John the Baptist does the same thing—giving us some interesting detail. We get John the Baptist's confession of faith in Jesus Christ here in our text from John the Evangelist.

It's easy to become confused by biblical names. There is a great deal of repetition. We know of five women in the New Testament named Mary. There are five men named Judas. There are five men named John. And I suppose we often do the same thing.

There is always a list of popular names going around. The most popular girl's name in 2022 was Amelia. And the boy's name was Liam. Although, there are also always those who go for something unique. The rockstar Frank Zappa named his children Moon Unit, Dweezil, and Diva Thin Muffin. We do have a guy named Ichabod in the Bible. There is a woman named Dorcas. And Isaiah names his son with my personal favorite Biblical name, Maher-shalal-hashbaz.

But for the rest of the sermon, as we talk about John, I will mean John the Baptist. Especially since the other John, quite humbly, never mentions himself by name in his entire book. We made much of the name of *Jesus* in the Christmas season. His name means *the LORD saves—Yahweh saves*. John's name means *Yahweh has been gracious*. These names are delivered from heaven by angels. And they have meaning behind related to the mission that God has given them.

As usual, we spent some time with John back in Advent. We know from Luke that John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. He was one of Jesus' close relatives. John lived an ascetic life in the wilderness as a Prophet with a Nazarite vow. And now we find that John is the one who baptized Jesus in the Jordan. And the Baptism of Jesus is what gives him the title.

And according to the other three Gospel writers, at the moment of Jesus' Baptism, as John stands with Jesus and pours Jordan water over His head, the Father speaks out the words that make Baptism what it is, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

And there is something more than a voice. The Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove and rests upon Jesus. He stays with Jesus. And here John witnesses and confesses to the world that the persons of the Trinity are working together to wash away all sin.

In our text, John had just been confronted about his identity and work by the Priests and Levites from Jerusalem. They asked him if he was the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet. He tells them that He is not the Christ. He tells them that he is not a metaphorical Elijah—although Jesus will disagree. This is probably another moment of humility for John. Instead, he confesses to them that the Prophet Isaiah had foretold his role, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.”

And then he tells them of another who was also prophesied by Isaiah. Jesus is the Servant-King who was to come. He is One they did not know. One who existed before John. One who existed before the creation of the world.

And notice the hint of accusation in his tone toward the Priests and Levites. He tells these religious leaders that they don’t know Jesus. They should. They should recognize Him. The prophets had promised just such a Savior. Yet *His own* received Him not. And John points it out. John’s words, although he is just speaking the Word of God, frequently sting.

But notice John’s own lack of clarity up to this point when it comes to Jesus. Even though they had met while they were both still in the womb, even though they were related by blood, John didn’t fully understand the identity of Jesus *until* His Baptism. And when this event occurred, notice John’s reaction. John responded with deep *humility* in the face of the glory of God revealed with Jesus’ Baptism.

Up to this moment, John was gathering quite a following. He had disciples. He had the attention of the religious establishment. They had even begun an inquiry into his preaching and ministry. He had upset quite a few people. He was doing well.

And we find that this was even a rather unexpected popularity. John had been preaching some pretty harsh stuff. He sounds a lot like Amos or Jeremiah, confronting sin and calling a thing what it is.

You know these words. He says to the religious crowd from Jerusalem, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And in a similar manner, Paul warns us about preachers who simply tell us what we want to hear. He warns us about preachers who affirm all that we already think and do. In 2 Timothy 4, St. Paul says, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

But John is *not* one of those preachers. He is not afraid to confront the sins of the rich and powerful. He is not afraid of a narrowly defined and precise confession of faith. He will confront the politicians for their adultery. And for whatever reason, he has still garnered the attention of the public.

Even though he is abrasive, and recluse, and lacks any sense of fashion, he is beloved—at least by some of the people. And although some think he has a demon—probably those he confronts—others consider him to be a true prophet.

But something changes when Jesus steps on the scene. At His anointing in the waters of Baptism, John steps back. He takes himself out of the limelight. He doesn't want the attention. That was never his motivation anyway. John retreats to a humble place.

This gets communicated to us in a few ways. Here in our text, he admits his ignorance. "I myself did not know him." This is not a prideful moment. John admits that the Baptism of Jesus opened up his eyes, just as it should for the rest of us. His understanding of the things of the Spirit has radically changed with Jesus' Baptism.

And now he sees his whole ministry to point people to Jesus. Twice in our text he says, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Behold is an imperative. It is a command.

He doesn't demand that the world pay attention to him. He doesn't name his ministry after himself. He wants the eyes of the world to be fixed on Jesus—and on what Jesus has come to do. And he even allows his disciples to walk away with Jesus. Later we find that John, while in prison, even sends his disciples to Jesus so that they might hear the truth from Him. We talked about this text a few weeks ago.

And finally, he confesses that he is unworthy to untie Jesus' sandals. He is not Jesus' equal. He is a humble sinner—an unworthy servant. He doesn't question the purposes of Jesus in his life. He desperately needs what Jesus has come to bring.

With the arrival of Jesus, his concerns fade into the background. John exists to give glory to God. He exists to receive what Christ comes to accomplish—taking away his sin. And he exists to make sure that his neighbors hear about the Savior from heaven. Personal attention doesn't really matter, now that Jesus has walked on the earth.

Just a couple of chapters later, in John 3, the disciples of John are concerned that so many people are going away from him to Jesus. You could understand that he might be concerned about the lack of success of his ministry. But he just is not. John's ministry is not about John.

The whole chapter is worth reading. But let me just include a few of his words as he answers those who are concerned about John's disciples going to Jesus. And notice that John once again connected the Baptism of Jesus with the giving of the Holy Spirit.

He says, "He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all....For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

When we are consumed with God's glory, we forget to worry about our own. We serve without needing affirmation, or appreciation, or attention. We give with no thought of reward. This is the way John views his own life. This is the way he views his ministry.

And this is just what it means to be a Christian. All of our concerns, all of our plans and agendas, pale in the glory of Jesus. We have nothing worth worrying about. Jesus has come to take away our sin—and this is our fundamental problem in the world.

And this means that we look for that kind of ministry. This is what we want from our church. We need a ministry that brings us to a humble place. That confronts sin. That exalts Christ. That brings us to an end.

It seems that the popular ministry out there is one that helps us to feel better about ourselves—that sustains our egos. It is all about optimism and self-esteem. It is centered on us rather than on Christ. Theologian William Willimon confronted this kind of preaching, “Unable to preach Christ and Him crucified, we preach humanity and it improved.”

We need preaching that resembles John the Baptist’s. John calls a thing what it is. And we need lives that resemble John the Baptist’s. He knows his place with Christ. Jesus says that John is a true Prophet. He says, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

But for John, he is simply an unworthy servant. He submits to Christ with true humility. He didn’t live for himself—he didn’t live by the dictates of the world. He lives for the mission that Christ had given in the world. He lives with discipline and obedience. He needs Jesus to define Him. He needs Jesus to be His Savior. This is a humble place to be—maybe even a little lonely. But it is exactly what Christ desires for him—and for us.

With the coming of Christ, we have to rely on Christ for everything. We have nothing that we have not received. We need our sins washed away. Christ must increase, we must decrease. But with John, we live in the name of Christ. We fix our eyes on the grace of God. We accept his invitation to come and see—to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*