

July 9, 2017
John 1:19-31

To Whom is our Life Pointing?

John the Baptist knows what he has come to do. He knows his job and his job is to make straight the way of the Lord. To create an easy route to God. To simple direct and introduce people to Jesus. That's why he is baptizing, that's why he is out there at the Jordan to give people a direct path, a straight shot at Jesus. And when Jesus appears to be baptized, John points everyone in his direction. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is what John has come to do. This is John's entire life's work in one scene, standing there pointing people to Jesus. And today I want to suggest that that's our life's work too; it's our job as people of faith: to point to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now John the Baptist may not be the Bible hero we feel most comfortable with. He is strange. He is loud. He is prophetic to the point of annoyance. But he has important lessons to teach us, lessons about making a straight path to Jesus and directing the world's attention beyond ourselves to God. Like John the Baptist, it's our job to prepare

the way OF THE LORD, not our own way. Like John the Baptist, we proclaim God's Kingdom, not our own Kingdom. Like John the Baptist, we point people to Jesus, to how great he is and how relevant he is and how important HE is for this world. Not to point to how important we are or how relevant we are or how great we are for this world. John the Baptist gives us three lessons today. First, he reminds us that we are not the Messiah. Second, that our job is to point to Jesus the Messiah. And third, that we need to get out of Jesus the Messiah's way.

John the Baptist's first lesson is a pointed one. That we are NOT the Messiah. In our story today, people have come, on behalf of the Pharisees, asking just who does John the Baptist think he is; is he the Messiah? Listen, John says, I am NOT the Messiah. John is very clear and very firm. Being the Savior is not his job. He is not the chosen one who will redeem God's people. Period. That's not who he is. Though I wonder how flattering it was to be asked. I wonder if John the Baptist felt a surge of pride and importance when they came to see him; because he WAS doing big things. He was drawing crowds of people from far and wide. They were coming to see Him and to be inspired by Him and

to hear his message that life could be different; that it could be real and holy. And they were saying things like: “Isn’t John great? And isn’t he wonderful? And don’t you feel close to God when you are around him? Though he could do a bit more with the seating and the bathrooms leave a lot to be desired. But don’t you just love John? Don’t you think he brings God’s word to life better than anyone else?”

People came to see John the Baptist and they wanted to believe in him and hope in him. And John might have been tempted to let them do that. To let them put their faith in him and idolize him and exalt him. And he might have been tempted to think he WAS the one who could save them and bring them back to God. And isn’t that what he was doing? And was there someone who could do any better?

No, John says, “No, I am not the Messiah. I am not the one to put your faith in. I am not the one to believe in or hope in or worship. Because I’m not the one who will save you.” John knows that’s not his job. And as the church, that’s not our job either. We are not the Messiah. We are not the Saviors of the world. Our church itself does not overcome darkness or defeat death. We cannot fix all of society’s ills or revive the

culture of Christendom no matter how much we want to or how much others think we ought to or need to. We are not the Messiah. Even if we believe can be. Even if others tell us we could be. John the Baptist teaches us to say no. As the church must say no. We are not the Messiah. We aren't the Savior of the world. Jesus is. As the church, we need to be reminded that we are not God. I am not the Messiah. You are not the Messiah. You should not expect that of me. And I should not expect that of you. Our faith is in someone who is beyond all of us, who holds us and heals us. Who has the world in his hands. Who works in ways that we don't quite see or understand. We are not the Messiah. Let's think about that. What does it mean to hear that? What does it mean to say that to ourselves and to the world?

John's first lesson is that we are not the Messiah. And John's second lesson is that we should know who the Messiah is. And that we should be cutting straight path to him, pointing people in his direction all the time. John the Baptist prepared his whole life to do that. It was his job to get people ready for Jesus. And as soon as Jesus appeared, he pointed to him in front of everyone and said. "There! There is the Lamb of God,

the one who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one for you to believe in and hope in.”

John points to Jesus. He doesn't point to himself. He doesn't point to what he has done, he points to Jesus and what he is about to do. And that's our job too, to point people to Jesus. Not to point to ourselves or our church or our denomination or our brand of Christianity. We don't want people to follow us or believe in us. We want them to believe in Jesus with us.

Because Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one who gave up heaven and glory for us. He was born in a manger for us. He lived a human life for us. He chased away the demons of fear and selfishness for us. He sacrificed for us. He died for us so that we could know what love is; that it is putting someone else's needs before your own. He showed us how to live and how to die and how to live again. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And our job is to point to that. To make a straight path to the self-giving love of God. To direct people to it with all that we do and say. Look, here's Jesus. Look, here's

compassion. Look, this is what love is. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

On Saturday, some of us took a trip to Uspiritus in Louisville.

Bellewood as it was once known. It's one of the residential homes for abused and neglected kids in Kentucky. Lee and Sara Busick went, along with some of our community youth group kids. And Lee and Sara prepared us ahead of time. They said, "we are going there to spend the day with these kids. And we are going there for them. Not for us. We are going to show them that we care about them and that God does too."

And yesterday, we went and ate with a dozen elementary-aged kids. We talked with them and laughed with them and danced with them. And I want to tell you, I have to tell you about how I saw God's love there.

The way our youth put those kids first. And set themselves aside. It was grace and mercy and redemption for all of us. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our mission, our job, is to point to Jesus. To make a straight path to God's self-giving love. Look, we say. Look at God's love blessing the poor and the hungry in our community. Look, see how God is with the

least and last and lost in our schools and care facilities and hospitals.

Look and see how there is no greater love than the love that lays down its life for the lives of others. Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our job is to point to Jesus. To make a straight path to him. John teaches us that we are not the Messiah. But we do know who is. And lastly, that once we point to the Messiah, that we need to get out of his way. John the Baptist had spent his whole life preparing people for Jesus. His whole identity was wrapped up in getting people ready for the Lord. He made a straight shot for people to repentance and forgiveness and restoration. And when the Lord appeared, John the Baptist stopped and stepped aside. He yielded the floor and let Jesus take it from there.

So often, in life, we want to have control of things. We want to be in charge. We want to manage things and orchestrate things and make life go according to our plans. And we act as if we can. We act as if we are the boss. And the world helps us pretend that we are, that we can have things our way. That life belongs to us. And the future belongs to us.

And the church belongs to us. But it doesn't. None of those things do.

They belong to God. And so, like John the Baptist, we yield everything to Jesus. We turn over everything to him.

In *The Book of Joy*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, discuss the good life according to Buddhist and Christian tradition. These two spiritual leaders are great friends, and they share a desire to bring compassion and healing to the world. Both men are in their eighties. And they both have lived through long years of suffering and hardship. Archbishop Tutu endured the racist apartheid system of South Africa. The Dalai Lama had to flee from Chinese persecution in Tibet and still lives in exile with from his home today. But both leaders agree that in spite of suffering in the world, we can still have joy. And the secret to having joy is to accept that nothing lasts forever. That nothing is permanent. And that we create sorrow and anger for ourselves when we believe that things, good or bad, will never change.

For this reason, both Christians and Buddhists practice dying. As Christians, we practice it with baptism. We practice dying to ourselves. Dying to others and their opinions. Dying to this world and its treasures. We remember our baptism and practice leaving everything behind and

entrusting ourselves body and soul to our Creator. In prayer, we practice surrendering everything. Surrendering our egos. Our agendas. Our plans for how we want things to go. We surrender ourselves, our families, our churches, our futures. We give them all to God. Because God will keep them and hold them and heal them. In Jesus Christ, God will redeem and restore and recreate. And we step back and get out of the way because it is God's job to be God. It's our job to let God do it.

Our mission is not to be the Messiah. Our job is not to be Jesus but to point to Jesus, to make a straight path to him and then get out of his way. Because this great rescue plan that God is about to pull off, it's not about us. It's not about our faith or our church or our life's work. It's about God and God's goodness and self-giving love. It's about our God who never gives up on us. Who sets God's own needs and God's own self aside for us. Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.