

243 Are You The One?

(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "Are You The One?", originally shared on December 10, 2022. It was the 243rd video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKaL2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)

The portion of the Gospels section of the Bible that will be read in the vast majority of churches in the world this coming Sunday will feature John the Baptist. Again. Why? Today we're going to find out what a guy who wore roadkill and ate bugs means for us at Christmas.

People are preparing for Christmas, and some are doing it by buying and selling.

Target sold some funny packaging for fake gifts a few years ago. They didn't this year because, I don't know, maybe people weren't that amused by a box that says it contains a pair of pants that make sounds like a real drum set when you slap on them, or a book that tells you how to make crafts out of cat hair. Maybe they found that people have lost their sense of humor.

Maybe they found that most people preferred a gift that was real this Christmas.

We're moving into the 3rd Sunday of Advent this coming Sunday. We hear Christmas hymns until they're coming out of our ears, but there aren't very many well-known and singable Advent hymns.

Therefore, one of them is one that many churches may be singing two Sundays in a row. And it illustrates the importance of an apostrophe: "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry." 😊

One of my favorite hymns as man and boy is "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." It takes its imagery from Jesus' words spoken at the Last Supper, the night he was betrayed, in **John 15:15**,

***15** I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

"What A Friend We Have In Jesus" takes its message from the power of the cross. It takes its image from seeing Jesus as our friend.

It is easy to think of Jesus as our friend. He is the Good Shepherd. He showed us God because He is God but he didn't exploit his power. He died for us.

But John the Baptist? We saw last week how John the Baptist was a guy who wore the skin of dead animals and ate bugs, who lived outside of civilization. The homeless man who yells at passers-by. A prophet.

He was the last of the Old Testament prophets. He bridged the gap between the Old and New Testament sections of the Bible.

But he did it without any regard for human hierarchies. In fact, he was kind of harsh, even and especially to those who were among the most respected persons of their day.

How easy is it to think of John the Baptist as a friend? I would say, "Not very."

And yet, here he stands at the crossroads, the fulfillment of one of the most cherished prophecies among the people of God in the 1,000 years before Christ was born.

John and Jesus were related, both had disciples and we get The Lord's Prayer because Jesus' disciples heard that John had taught his disciples how to pray. Later on in the Bible, we'll get the whole "Game of Thrones" story of John's gruesome death.

We find out a lot about John the Baptist. And yet, Jesus says, you and I are greater than he in the Kingdom of God. How can that be?

We begin today's verses about John the Baptist with one of the most poignant moments in history, in **Matthew 11:2-3**,

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Jesus, the one for whom John's role was to prepare the way, was just beginning his public ministry.

John was in prison for publicly calling out the morality of a major local government official of the Roman empire. John probably knew that things did not look good for him in prison, and he wanted to know if his life had been wasted, or not.

It all hinged on the answer to one question.

Imagine the meaning of your life hinging on that one question? You know what, it does.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one of God? Do you believe that Christmas celebrates his birth, God become flesh?

Do you believe that he died for us and took his life back again in the Resurrection?

Do you believe that he is present among us right now and that he is coming again to judge the living and the dead?

Many of us have longed for the coming of the Messiah, some before we were Christians and some both before and after. Sometimes people are longing for the coming of the Messiah even when they can't articulate the longing or put a name to what they are longing for.

Maybe you are longing for the coming of the Messiah.

Maybe you know someone who is longing right now.

All people who do not know God intimately have what has been called a God shaped hole within them. God is right there, knocking at the door to every heart, asking only to be let in.

We don't bring God to people, God is already there. Seeking to redeem them, to save them, to make them whole. We just name the name.

That is especially true at Christmas, when the message is at least suggested all around us.

Will you be the one to invite people to open the door to let God come in?

Will you be the one to prepare the way?

Will you be the one to name the Name?

Or, just invite people to worship with you at a time of the year when people who wouldn't otherwise consider it are open to an invitation.

I saw a meme some time ago that described "Reality Evangelism". In the first panel, a girl says to a boy, "Yeah, I go to church." In the second panel she says, "Wanna come?"

Will you be the one to invite someone to worship with you this Christmas?

Jesus' answer to John's plaintive question follows in **Matthew 11:4-6**,

⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Jesus points to his miracles as evidence that he is the Messiah, but what did he mean?

Miracles are not a suspension of the laws of Nature. Miracles are a moment of restoration of the way God created things to be.

All evil, all that is broken in this world, comes through human rejection of God. Our rejection of God, our sin, separates us from God.

Miracles point to what God intended for us.

The cross is where God restores what was broken. Where God is the One for us. The relationship with God that was broken is now restored for all who believe what God has promised and are baptized into God in Jesus Christ.

John didn't live to see that. He never got out of prison. He was beheaded. He died before Jesus gave his life on the cross to usher in the already-but-not-yet-perfected Kingdom of God.

Jesus spells this out in **Matthew 11:7-11**,

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

That's us. Unlike John the Baptist, we live on the other side of the cross. We do not just point to Jesus, we have experienced His grace.

We have good news to share, and we are the only ones who will. If not us, who?

Are you the one?

The world doesn't give Jesus a second thought at Christmas, but we can name the name.

Are you the one?

We are not the light of the world, but we can be reflectors of the light.

Are you the one?

I am certain that your church has prepared materials to help you invite people to know Jesus, God with us, the Word made Flesh, the light of the world at Christmas. Who will share them? Put them on public bulletin boards? Include them with their Christmas cards? Hang them on doorknobs? Hand them to friends and neighbors with a personal word?

Are you the one?

Maybe people are looking for a gift that is real this Christmas and need someone to prepare the way.

Are you the one?

All that people will need to hear from someone this Christmas is, "Have you heard about Jesus?"

Are you the one?