

## **Pastor Roy's sermon from June 24, 2018 (John The Baptist)**

Today we recall the life of John the Baptist. John prepared the way for Jesus. He got people's attention out in the wilderness wearing camel skin and eating locusts and wild honey and calling the people to turn back to God's life giving justice. He wasn't concerned with whether people liked him or even thought he was odd.

John wasn't concerned about their thoughts about God or prayers to God. He called folks to turn back **to** God—to return. Turning back to God is about being humble and open to God.

John calls to us too. He is still preparing the way.

John simply says, "Turn. Turn back to God. Listen to God. Pray! Leave behind the 'just make me feel better' distractions, excuses, rules, gimmicks. Just turn! Pure and simple. . . Turn."

To turn is to change our orientation. Perhaps we are oriented toward ourselves—what we fear, what motivates us. Perhaps we are oriented toward others—what they fear, what they are motivated by. We hear John's voice crying out, "Focus on God! Allow God to be God!" Not what we need or want God to be. John had lots of practice praying in the wilderness/listening to God. John learned of a way to know if one was truly listening to God.

John's test was simple: How does one treat another in need. When people asked John what they should do, now that they had turned and were baptized, he told them. Share clothes and food with the poor. Treat people justly in your work. Do not take advantage of your power. John's simple test was compassion. Not perfection or how often we pray. Compassion. Since compassion comes easier for some than others, I'm thinking it matters less what we feel about how we treat our neighbor, and more, simply, how we treat them.

John's life was a life of sacrifice. So was Jesus'. Setting oneself aside for the good of others is compassion. Humility is not thinking lowly of ourselves, it is remembering to prefer the needs of others to ourselves. Preferring others might mean that we end up doing some things that are really difficult, because others need us to do them. Perhaps along the way, you can teach them how to do those tough things themselves. God is at work among us. The grace of God takes our humble sacrifices for others and new life is born.

Here is a reminder: Salvation is always a gift of God. Grace is freely given, freely received. We see it all around us. But even as after John baptized folks, he invited them to serve their neighbors, so we can be the demonstration of God's grace in action after we have received it ourselves. Sometimes we bring salvation to life for those around us.

So perhaps we can learn three things from John. Our first task is to listen to God and allow others to help us listen.

Secondly, we also prepare the way for the Lord. Our presence brings the presence of Christ into the world today.

Finally, our active concern for others reveals our faith. Being the presence of Christ in our world will mean that we act with compassion, whether we feel it or not.

Thanks be to God.