

Sermon
13 January 2019
West Kirk & Polbeth Harwood

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Reading: John 3:22-36

Today we are taking a look at the life of the man called John the Baptist.

Who was he? We know quite a few things about him. He was: The son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, the cousin of Jesus, the one who prepared the way for our Lord, the one who smoothed the path for Jesus.

Preparing people for Jesus was John's life calling.

And he did this by telling people about Jesus, by urging them to turn their backs on their old sinful lives and to start afresh as children of God, and then by baptising those who did this.

He was like a prophet. He knew God had a very important job for him to do, and he did that job with all his heart.

He gave it everything he had, and never once did he confuse his role with that of Jesus - which is something that could actually quite easily have happened, if we think about it.

Because listen to what John's disciples said to him in our reading. They were panicking, because they lived in a society where the public's opinion about a person was very important. If the crowds liked you, you would be able to move the world, if they didn't, well, your words would be worth nothing...

So they said: "Teacher! John! You know that man you were telling us about? Jesus? Well, he is *also* baptising people at this very moment, and everyone is going to *him!*"

They were worried that if more people went to Jesus to be baptised rather than to John, John would lose his status and authority. And in the process their whole group might lose their credibility.

But instead of panicking, John calmly assured them that that was nothing to be worried about. That is exactly what was *supposed* to happen.

What John's followers were doing is very human – they were worried about their popularity, they were jealous that another group were doing better than they were doing!

It's that intrinsic thing about always wanting to be the best. We want to thrive, we want to stand out, but we don't want others to thrive too!! We don't want anybody else to steal our limelight.

But that is not who God wants us to be. He wants us to want to see the sun shine on other people too. Life is not a competition!

But we so very often make it one... I've actually quite often seen this happening between churches. And I'm pretty sure you'll all know exactly what I'm talking about here: People will say – look, our neighbouring church are attracting more young people than we are! What can we do to get some of them to come here to us?!

But an attitude like that is missing the point – because both churches are serving the same Lord! Why don't both churches go out and find people who don't belong to any church at all? And maybe even do that *together*?!

In any case, John wasn't even in the least bit concerned about Jesus' popularity rising – if anything, it was a sign that he was doing his job well.

He was making the path straight for Jesus, preparing people so they would be ready to receive him.

So the picture I have in my head when I hear this, is me preparing my house for my mum-in-law's visit before Christmas!

Everything had to be ready before she arrived. The house had to be squeaky clean. I bought wee Scottish gifts to leave on her bed, I sorted out all the wardrobes so she would have room to put away her clothes and I rearranged the kitchen cupboards, because I knew she would be cooking and I didn't want her to think badly of me for not having everything in its place!

I didn't want to leave her under the impression that her precious blue-eyed boy wasn't well taken care of, so I hardly slept the week before she arrived, but in the end almost everything was in place and we were ready for her visit.

That's what John did for Jesus. Just obviously on a much bigger scale. He devoted his whole life to preparing people's hearts and their lives for receiving the Saviour!

He knew what his role was, and he played it well.

The author of our passage makes use of a symbol, a metaphor, to explain the role John played, and I would like to elaborate on that.

He explains John's role by referring to a wedding. A metaphor Jesus himself used too to explain his relationship with us.

Only difference is, where we can almost be certain that *something* will go wrong at every wedding we attend, Jesus and everything he did was perfect.

Jesus refers to us, to his church, as the bride. To him we are beautiful and pure, dressed in white, excited about walking into our futures with him – Jesus – the groom. The one who loves us more than he loves himself. The one who literally gave his own life for us.

Jesus is the guy who gets the girl, like we read in verse 29: The bride belongs to the bridegroom.

John is Jesus' best man. The rest of that verse says: "The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice!"

At a traditional Jewish wedding it was the task of the best man to take the bride to her room and to wait there and make sure that no-one comes and steals her away. But then, when the groom arrives, that's him relieved of his duties.

Now we all know that even today a best man has a very important role to play at a wedding. He has to help the groom get certain things arranged before the time, he needs to support the groom and make sure that he doesn't forget anything important, like the ring, and at the ceremony he stands by the groom's side all the time. He also has to give a very important speech at the wedding reception, but then, when the wedding is over, that's his job done.

Not too long ago, in Roman times, when fathers still arranged their children's marriages, it was more about getting married than about who you were getting married to, so it would be the best men's job to actually marry the bride if something was to happen to her on the way to the wedding ceremony!

So – the best man has always had a very important job, but he is not the main man on the day – he is there in a supportive role.

And that was John. He excelled at being Jesus' best man. He supported him and made sure that everything fell into place for him, and then, when the time came for Jesus to step up, John was happy for him. He

wasn't jealous, he didn't wish it could be him standing there next to bride – he was just happy that he did his job well.

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And you know, I think we can all learn a very important lesson from John.

John's attitude to life was right. He showed great generosity and humility, recognising that Jesus had a more important role to play in God's plan of salvation than he did. But that didn't bother him, because he knew that his mission was part of a much bigger story...

We should also do what God wants us to do, do it well, and not worry about what other people think or how successful they are at what they are doing...

God has different roles for all of us to play. In life, but also at home, at work, at school, at everything we are involved in, and of course, also here at church.

Some people have to come up with the ideas for projects, others need to lead these projects, others need to support them. We are all different, and what God wants us to do is figure out our role and then play it well.

This year our Stewardship Campaign here at the church is about talents. And during March we are going to do a few special activities to discover what our talents are and how we can use them to glorify God.

There are so many important roles to be played here at our church, and something I would really like to see is for people to serve in supporting roles as well. If we could get deputies for all the different roles here at the church, that means that the convenors will be able to do their jobs even better.

Let's be who God wants us to be; People who support each other;
People who make life easier for those around us.

I think a big mistake so many people make today is to think that if they play a supporting role, they'll always live in somebody else's shadow. But that's not true. Supporting another person's success won't ever dampen yours.

Nobody can reach any height all by themselves. In order for someone to be able to fly, they'll need wind and someone in a control tower to help them have a safe journey. All 3 of those roles are of the utmost importance. We can't all want to be flying, because, to be truthful, then nobody will ever be able to even take off!!

John was the wind that made Jesus fly.

Let's be who God wants us to be. So whether you are the best man, the usher, the flower girl or the wedding planner – give it all you've got. Make everything you do something that's worth remembering.

If you are the one who has to lead others on the right path, lead them with determination.

If you are the one who has to motivate others to keep going, motivate them with all your heart.

If you are the one who has to help people up after they've fallen, help them up with all your strength.

If you are the one who has to stick plasters on other's wounds, do that with compassion.

If you are the one who has to pick up the pieces, do that with dignity.

Whatever your role is, play it well – because it's part of a bigger picture. And together we can make this church, this world, our lives, a success story, to the glory of God.

Amen