

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Matthew 3:1-17

John the Baptist might best be understood as a road construction project manager. He yelled out orders to make the way clear for the Messiah. His orders included the instruction to repent—to turn from that which caused hazards in one's life and way to the Messiah. He had a curious wardrobe, not the usual hard hat and bright yellow or orange vest sported by road workers. Instead, he wore a long shirt made of camel hair, secured around his waist with a belt. His lunch bucket was organic, natural food: locusts and honey. I suppose one would want something sweet to slather on the bugs to be able to swallow them.

This road construction project manager attracted people, all kinds of people. They heard his warning words and came to him to undergo the ritual of baptism in the Jordan River, demonstrating their washing away of roadblocks that get in their way from getting to know the Messiah. John the Baptist claimed that he was not the Messiah, but was pointing toward him. That's what his message and his practice of baptism did; it pointed down the road to someone greater than John the Baptist.

John said, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry." John knew his place. He realized that he was only preparing the road for the Messiah. He wasn't the Messiah. John points to a promise: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Strong words. But, then again, one isn't surprised by such salty and threatening language since John's occupation was spiritual road construction.

Even as John was speaking, Jesus came to him to be baptized. The Son of God who has nothing from which to repent requested baptism. Even John the Baptist said to him in astonishment, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" Jesus went under the water of the Jordan River to "fulfill all righteousness," and at that moment heaven opened, the Spirit came upon him, and the voice of the Father spoke these powerful words, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The road John the Baptist had constructed led right to Jesus, the Messiah.

When I was a young, new Christian, I thought that all the Johns in the Bible were the same: John the Baptist, John Mark, and John the author of the Gospel of John, along with the three letters and the Book of Revelation at the end of the Bible. I was confused. Until I sorted out the Johns—and this John sorted out me. This John, John the Baptist, is a provocative road construction project manager who does his job and does it well. He points us to the savior.

The road is made clear for us, too. We are challenged by this character, John the Baptist, to recognize Jesus as Messiah, to give our lives to him because he was tasked to give his life for us.

Prayer:

Our Great God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, clear the road of my life from all hindrances and sin that I might be led to follow Jesus, the Messiah, wherever you lead me. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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