OUR NAME IS

JOHN

Using Our Lives to Point to Jesus

GROUP STUDY 2022
Prophet, prophesied, baptizer, rabble-rouser, critic, humble, instrument, forerunner, prisoner, cousin of God - all these descriptors paint a picture of a mysterious man named John. Before Jesus’ ministry began, John the Baptist’s preaching for the forgiveness of sin was on everyone’s mind. People traveled for miles into the desert to hear him speak. At his direction, they repented and were baptized. Yet, when the time for Jesus’ ministry began, John, knowing his mission, began to decrease so Jesus could increase.

As the Church, we are also called to point to Jesus and declare His imminent arrival. Are we prepared to set aside our sense of individual importance and point others to Christ? What can we learn from the life of John the Baptist? Join Lead Pastor Eric Laverentz at First Presbyterian Church of Edmond as we delve into the life of John the Baptist.

January 9
Luke 1:67-79  Made to Be a Light in the Darkness

January 16
Matthew 3:1-12  Preparing the Way

January 23
John 1:19-30  Behold the Lamb of God

January 30
Alisa Childers

February 6
John 3:22-36  He Must Increase and I Must Decrease

February 13
Mark 6:21-29  The Way of Prophets
“TEN COMMANDMENTS”
To Get the Most from Your Small Group

1. Read the Scripture lesson beforehand and pray before you read it asking the Holy Spirit to speak with you.

2. Attend regularly; make being there a priority.

3. Read and pray about the questions beforehand.

4. Be fully present in the group (put your phone aside).

5. Trustfully and truthfully share who you are.

6. Keep what is shared in the group in the group; don’t share outside the group.

7. Listen to what others have to say.

8. Write down the prayer requests and pray daily for the others in your group.

9. Do something together to serve your community.

10. Invest in someone in your group, cultivate a friendship.
QUOTES

There is no higher calling, no loftier dream, and no greater goal than to live, breathe, and be poured out for Jesus Christ.

Jamie in Brother Andrew’s “The Calling”

[John] went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

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“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
And all people will see God’s salvation.’"

...The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

Luke 3:3-6, 15-18
7 CORE PRACTICES & VISION

GATHER

1. SHARE who you are
2. CARE for one another

GROW

3. READ and PRACTICE scripture
4. PRAY together

GO

5. INVEST in people
6. SERVE community
7. CREATE and SEND leaders

NEW LIFE, through JESUS, for EDMOND and the WORLD.
Lesson #1 “Made to Be a Light in the Darkness”

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:67-79

John’s father Zechariah had not spoken for nine months but once he did, he said a mouthful. During his silence, the Holy Spirit had revealed to him so much about the Lord’s mission of his infant son. John was called to be a prophet, to prepare the way and point to the coming of the Lord who would deliver God’s people from darkness to light and death to peace. This is very similar to the mission Jesus has given His Church, to prepare the world for His coming again to make all things new. How seriously do we take our mission as a.) the Church together and b.) followers of Jesus individually to point to Jesus and His coming again?

1. Do you have a message about Jesus just burning inside you? Has the Lord laid anything on your heart about the Gospel that just must simply must be shared? What is it? Why are our stories one of the most powerful tools for sharing Jesus? Read Acts 26:12-39 and share what elements of Paul’s story are most compelling.

2. What is the enemy from which God’s people will be delivered? (Luke 2:71) What does Psalm 18:3 promise we must do to be delivered from our enemies? What or who is the enemy you would like the Lord to deliver you from? How is Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about
the ultimate statement of victory over our enemies? (Matthew 5:44)

3. What does it look like to ‘serve God without fear?’ (Matthew 1:74) Is there some place you are fearing to serve God? Why are you afraid? How does the Lord’s promise that we can serve Him without fear mitigate that promise?

4. Which of the promises God makes about John’s role as ‘prophet of the Most High’ speak the most to you? (Luke 1:76-79). What ‘light and peace’ does our world need to experience today? How might Jesus be calling you to testify to that? What does 1 Peter 2:9 say about God’s call and our role? To whose character does our witness ultimately point to? Ours or the Lord’s? Why is that important?

Next Steps:
Where is a place where you see darkness and conflict? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what kind of witness you may be in that place. Share your prayer with your group and ask them to discern with you.
Lesson #2 “Preparing the Way”

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew 3:1-12

John’s message was uncompromising, his lifestyle was astonishing, his anointing by the Holy Spirit apparent and his appeal was widespread. In short, John was a dangerous man. He was dangerous to the religious establishment and those who claimed ultimate authority. John did all this without promoting himself but pointing to Someone else who was coming- someone whose sandal he was not even worthy to untie. John was powerful, humble and uncompromising. How does this compare to the Church and our lives?

1. John’s message to “Prepare the way of the Lord” came directly from the prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40:3. How does knowing God’s Word prepare us to be a witness for Jesus and point to Him? How does Hebrews 4:12 describe its impact? What is your practice of studying the Word? How have you seen God’s Word speak to you?

2. Have you lived against the grain, counter-culturally like John did? If so,
how? *(Matthew 3:4)* Does your life look mostly like the lives of everyone in the culture around you? What does the Bible teach about non-conformity? *(Romans 12:2)* According to Romans 12:2, what causes us to live lives that do not conform to the world? What happens to the world when we do not conform to it?

3. Does it surprise you that John does not mince words with those coming to hear him? *(Matthew 2:7-10)* Why or why not? Do you think in the Church today we could be bolder in calling people to repent? Did Jesus call people to repent? *(Luke 13:1-9)* Why do you think the Church fears telling people to live differently today? Do you agree?

4. How does Jesus use other means than His people to share the Gospel? What happens when the Church becomes disconnected from Jesus and His purposes? *(Matthew 3:10, John 15:1-10)* Who connects us to Jesus, fills us with God’s power and makes our witness effective? *(John 16:7-9).* How does John allude to this work of the Holy Spirit? *(Matthew 3:11)*

**Next Steps:**
Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one way you could live like John, against the grain, counter-culturally? Share it with your group and practice living that way this week.
Lesson #3 “Behold the Lamb of God”

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’

John 1:19-30

John was crystal clear about his role- his life’s mission was to point to Jesus. People enthralled with his ministry tried to make him into the Messiah, but John was wiser. He resisted the temptation. He also resisted the temptation to take on another person’s ministry. Instead, John listened to the Lord’s call for his life through the word of God. John steadfastly pointed to Jesus by clearly articulating Jesus’ transcendent role as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

1. What is your life’s mission? Have you ever thought about it? Why or why not? Do you compare yourself to someone else and their mission? Do you flirt with having your own Messiah-like mission? What do the Ten Commandments teach about coveting someone else’s life? (Exodus 20:17) What does Scripture teach about the people of God having a variety of gifts? (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) Why has the Holy Spirit gifted the Church so diversely?

2. When John’s ministry was questioned, how did he respond? Did he defend himself or point to Jesus? (John 1:26) Why is it important in our life to not stand on our own authority but upon Jesus? (Matthew 28:18-
20) Whose authority is greater? How does Jesus describe the authority He gives us? (Mark 16:14-19)

3. Why do you think the Pharisees took such an exception to John’s ministry? Why would they be opposed to forgiveness of sins by baptism alone? How did Jesus describe the Pharisees? (Matthew 23:1-7) How did John’s ministry, even his appearance alone, defy them? What are some examples of Pharisee-like behavior today? Where do we find this kind behavior? Both inside the church as well as outside?

4. We know that John was older than Jesus by a few months but why does he say “Jesus came before him?” (John 1:1-7) How bold was John’s claim that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? What did he base this on? (Isaiah 53:4-7) Why would the Pharisees have objected to this claim? What did they stand to lose? What is the boldest public claim you have made about Jesus? How bold do you consider that statement to be? Do you ever want to be bolder?

Next Steps:
Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal to you whose life mission you are pursuing. Share what you hear from the Holy Spirit with your group. If you hear you are not on God’s mission for your life, ask Him to reveal that to you as well.
After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.  

John 3:22-36

When we are focused on the Kingdom, we are not competitive with others but rejoice in the work of the Kingdom being done. Life becomes more about Jesus and less about us and this transformation fills us with joy. Our life becomes one ever-flowing fount of abundance and life. We never know the scarcity of those who focus on this world and its offerings. Instead, we find peace and joy in our focus on the Kingdom rather than fear and wrath in looking to ourselves and this world.

1. What does Malachi 3:1 teach about the messenger to come? What signs point to John? How does John claim to this messenger? If John saw himself in any other way (charismatic leader, brilliant theologian, influencer) what would his reaction be to people leaving him to follow Jesus?
What was John’s actual reaction? How does one congregation become competitive with other churches? How did Paul address competition in the ministry of the church? (*1 Corinthians 1:10-17*)

2. How important is it for us to know what we are not anyone’s Savior, let alone our own? Is this how we live? What does our instinct tend to be? (*Mark 10:35-45*) Why do you think Jesus found it necessary to tell us to ‘lose our life?’ (*Luke 9:23-27*)

3. What two things did John say ‘completes his joy?’ (*John 3:29-30*) What does it mean for the Church to be Jesus’ bride? How does this paint a picture for the intimacy we are supposed to have with Jesus? How close did Jesus say He has brought us to be? (*John 17:22-24*) Who creates our intimacy with Jesus? (*John 14:15-17*) Why do we need to decrease and allow Jesus to increase in our life to be close to Him? How does this same principle apply in all our relationships?

4. What does it mean that the Father has given all things into the hand of the Son? (*John 3:35*) How does Scripture explain this idea further? (*Colossians 1:15-20*) What does the Father putting all things into Jesus’ hands say about our salvation? Is our salvation dependent upon us or Jesus? Who is the heavenly guarantee of our salvation? (*Ephesians 1:11-14*) How does ‘decreasing’ and dying to self create a place for the Holy Spirit?

**Next Steps:**
Ask the Holy Spirit where you are resisting Jesus and continually trying to increase rather than decrease and allow His presence to grow in our life and the world. Share this with your group and ask them to hold you accountable.
Lesson #5 “The Way of Prophets”

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias’s daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Mark 6:21-29

Much like Jesus, John met a very ignoble end. He was arrested by Herod Antipas (the son of Herod the Great) and thrown in his prison in Machcerus on the east side of the Dead Sea. John’s crime was telling the truth, criticizing Antipas for marrying his brother’s wife, Herodias- while his brother was still married to her. Because of this, John was hated by his entire family and they demanded his arrest and eventually his head on a platter. There are consequences to telling the truth in the middle of a broken and sinful world. The corruption of the powerful often has dramatic consequences for this world but we trust that God is in charge and He will have the final say.

1. Have you ever had a difficult encounter with the powerful? What made it so difficult? Did they use their power well? Were they fair? What assurances can we have when we speak the truth? What does the Bible promise about the truth? (John 8:31-32) How is knowing the truth an integral part to being a follower of Jesus?

2. There is much in this story that is difficult to hear. What troubles you the most about what happened to John? When Jesus was told about John’s story, he left others to be alone and pray (Matthew 14:12-13).
What made John’s death so difficult for Jesus? Do you think Jesus saw His own fate in what happened to John?

3. Antipas’ reactions to John are complex. Why do you think Antipas had such a hard time understanding John? What does Antipas’ complex feelings and waffling toward John reveal about his character? *(James 4:8)*  
Why are the double-minded so destructive? How did Antipas’ oath harm him and John the Baptist? *(Mark 6:22-26)* What does the Bible teach about taking oaths? *(James 5:12, Matthew 5:34)*

4. What has been your main takeaway from this sermon series on John the Baptist? Have you been emboldened to point to Jesus? In which ways? Are you encouraged to die to self and decrease in any way? Share this with your group and ask them to hold you accountable.

**Next Steps:**  
Is there a certain area in which the Lord is calling you to speak the truth no matter the consequences? Share this conviction with your small group and make a plan.
Isenheim Altarpiece (right panel)
Nikolaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald