

**Like John. Like Jesus.**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**John 1:29-42**  
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Luke's gospel tells us that two women, cousins, gather for a retreat. One is seasoned, the other is just a teenager. They're entering a new season together: expectant motherhood. A powerful, divine source, Luke calls him an angel, tells Elizabeth and Mary that their children will change the world: one child, John, will prepare the way of God, and the other child, Jesus, will illumine the way of God.

John begins God's readying process even in the womb – he leaps in his mamma's belly the very first time he senses Jesus. John's will be a divinely-credentialed witness. John's initial proclamation, coupled with his mother Elizabeth's support and encouragement, will steel Mary for the season ahead, even prompting Mary to burst into joyful song at being chosen as God's servant.

John has been given the amazing ability to recognize God, in this case, even before God's chosen will be aware of his manifestation. John sees what Jesus will become; John believes what Jesus will become; John proclaims what Jesus will become; John paves the way for Jesus, long before Jesus will discover his own calling.

Fast forward three decades or so. Elizabeth and Mary's boys have grown up. They're living into their callings. John's been blazing a trail out in the wilderness, inviting people into a life of repentance – I know that word has been twisted in all sorts of way – but in this instance, I believe that repentance is a turning toward God, and a turning away from the things that dilute God, and dilute our God-given and God-centered humanity. Jesus, it turns out, is the very pupil who will be able to demonstrate such devotion and discipleship toward, and such dependence upon God.

This morning's text from John's Gospel, offers a glimpse of the intersection of two ministries. John has been preparing people to receive what's coming, and Jesus is about to become who he's meant to be. Now maybe you've sensed the spirit, or felt the spirit, or even breathed it in or breathed it out. But John saw the spirit – in

this sense, he saw it visually, his heart confirmed the phenomenon, and with his own eyes, he watched the spirit manifest itself, or drape, or cloak, or remain on Jesus. John observed, with total and complete awareness, perhaps similar to Moses at the burning bush, that the spirit was about to do remarkable things in Jesus. There was an inertia. John's calling was intertwined with another. And before you go getting all intellectual on me, and wishing that I'd stop spinning yarns, or believing tall tales, I'll remind you that our creation is full of animals, plants, and other beings who have an intuitive instinct or feeling that is SO absurd, SO audacious, SO phenomenal, it can only be true. Sometimes nature just knows. And I think today, John, just knew that God's spirit was draped all over Jesus.

John's gospel does offer a different take on the history between John and Jesus. Luke implies that the two are cousins, once or twice removed. Luke's version conjures up an image of the two men having regular interactions at the annual family reunion or gathering. But John the Evangelist seems to imply that the two men are strangers. John doesn't recognize Jesus for kinship, John recognizes Jesus, because God has allowed him to see what others are not yet able to see. I think both accounts of the relationship are equally informative – both tell us that John can be a trusted source of truth. Somehow, somehow, John is a witness that is beyond skepticism. And I want to invite that fact to sink in for just a moment. In today's polarized and partisan culture, how many folks can we hold up in such a light? Whose witness is one you can trust, even if you don't want to? John's truth is SO piercing, even his adversaries and enemies come to the wilderness to hear what he's got to say – his floor is Elijah, his ceiling is Messiah. I'd call that credentialed.

Okay, so I've rambled a bit this morning. I'm sorry for that, but today's lection is high on subtleties, and low on action. What's actually happening in our text?

One, John, a credentialed witness, identifies Jesus as God's anointed.

Two, John not only identifies Jesus as God's anointed, but he calls him the *Lamb of God*. I want to avoid a discussion of atonement theology this morning, because I know that brings up mixed emotions. However, I want to encourage you to notice that word lamb. John not only recognizes who Jesus is, but he also recognizes what kind of leader Jesus is gonna be. The ministry of Jesus is going to

be steeped in the qualities of servanthood, sacrifice, humility, transparency, and love. And that's a whole lot different than the leaders of his day. And again, John sees that difference in Jesus.

Three, John reminds his young disciples that Jesus is the one they need to follow now. Much like a teacher in an elementary or middle school setting, John has readied or prepared his disciples for what comes next. Don't think of this transition as an inadequacy on John's part, as if he's ill-equipped to train disciples. Quite the contrary, he's equipped with the humility to recognize his part in the larger story. And he's equipped with the humility to embrace the grace that comes with the completion of a calling.

Fourth, Jesus invites others to follow him. We've spent twelve weeks chasing stars, and waiting for babies to be born, and waiting for babies to develop into adults. The focus now changes from waiting for Jesus, to experiencing Jesus. And it's not just gonna be John who can see God's spirit cloaked in the life of Jesus. The disciples, and you and me as well, are invited to "come and see" where he stays, and how we loves, and where he'll go.

In a general sense, I think this text is saying, "Sardis Baptist Church, get ready!!! God has invited you to come and see all the places God's spirit will manifest itself in the year ahead, many of those places being ones you never imagined were possible. Still others, being places you thought were too insignificant catch the spirit's attention." It's an invitation Sardis. To something real. To something a bit mysterious. To something transformative. To something you have the ability to come and see.

We're also in a season of transition – this time of year, our congregation calls new leaders, re-affirms existing leaders, and offers rest and gratitude to those who step away. I think John and Jesus can teach us all a little something about these transitions.

Each one of you, each one of us, is a little bit like John. God has given each of us the gift of seeing in ways that only we can see, and such sight offers truth the world desperately needs to hear. Perhaps someone here recognizes God's anointed in our midst, before they can recognize God's calling in themselves. Some see deacons, or singers, or cooks, or finance wizards, or healers, or

comedians, or writers, or leaders, or any manifestation of God-given uniqueness and giftedness in those around them. They see the spirit working. And better yet, they have confidence in the truth they hear. And they don't see the giftedness of others as an impediment to their own wellbeing and advancement. And so they help ready others.

Each one you, each of us, is also, a little bit like Jesus. No matter who we are, God sees our potential. And God sends people, maybe they are cousins, maybe they are strangers, maybe they are even Saints fans, who help ready the way for us to become the people we need to be. Like Jesus, should we choose to believe God is invested in us, AND choose to live as if such a belief matters, then we too, can receive our callings, and live into them.

Here's what I'm getting at Sardis Baptist Church. What if we were the kind of congregation that operated in a manner where all in our community were given John-like credentials for recognizing, supporting, and empowering the gifts we see in one another? And all were given the confidence to trust our spirit radars?

And what if we were the kind of congregation, who trusted the spirit radars of our community members, and let that trust and confidence in our gifts bloom into new callings, new frontiers, and new faith in the world God is creating?

That's an experiment, that's a community, that's a spirit I'd like to come and see. I hope you'll join me in such a pursuit. May it be so. And may it be soon. Amen.