

A Sermon by The Reverend Stephanie Jenkins

> December 8, 2019 Advent 2 Year A

Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church Lawton, Oklahoma

An audio recording of this sermon can be found on Saint Andrew's Church website at:

https://www.saintandrewslawton.org/copy-of-st-andrew-s-current-events

# John the Baptist's Job Description: Helping Us Prepare to See with the Eyes of Christ

Matthew 3: 1-13 & Romans 15: 4-13

The Reverend Stephanie Jenkins Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church

> Advent 2 – Year A December 8, 2019

The Second Sunday in Advent always brings one of Scripture's most beloved prophets. In our tradition at least in our day and age, it's not uncommon to hear ... What in the world are do we do with him? How do we make sense of John the Baptist? I think one way to more fully understand John the Baptist is to think about his role, his "job" if you will, in the overall Narrative of Jesus. And what better way to get a synopsis of a "job" than to read a job description (after all we are the 21st century)!

So, here's a job description for you.

#### **Position Overview:**

The candidate's sole task will be one of foreshadowing with prophetic clarity the arrival of the One who separates the time of the old age that we know from the new age that is to come

#### Must possess the following skills:

Comfort with being an outsider, one who is on the periphery, is mandatory. The ability to speak the necessary hard truth ideally in love.

The ability to be at ease with any and all types of people, especially those not traditionally "accepted"

Familiarity and acumen with use of Scriptures.

### **Duties include:**

Living in and building community in the hinterlands.

Maintaining a diet of locust & wild honey
as an act to show solidarity with the rural community.

Making use of any and all resources available – ie camel hair coat

Ability to baptize any and all who came to him

(which you know those power at the Temple in Jerusalem aren't gonna like)

Offering both words of judgment depending on your audience,

"he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire"

AND words of hope

"one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals."

Point to the larger coming reality of the New Age of Christ

## Any takers?

In case you are considering, I feel ethically mandated to remind you this job didn't end well. He was beheaded at the request of King Herod. Something tells me that if John was able to read my job description he would add somewhere on the document, in bold and likely in all caps --- "THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS!!"

And I have to admit, there's a part of me that is tempted to shew him away and downplay the real sense of urgency to "shape up" as just a part of his passionate nature and therefore a passionate message. This idea is akin to the idea that we need people who are prophetic and passionate in our world, yes, but what do we do with them? Perhaps they are best listened to by tempering their passionate message a bit, while paying attention to the greater message underneath it. For a while this was my sermon. It is a safer more pragmatic way to be in the world for sure!

In my prayers though as this sermon took shape, what I could not shake was the multitude of places we see John's urgent call to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child. His mother Elizabeth foreshadows the coming of Christ with John's birth, John's baptisms and ministry foreshadows Jesus' ministry with outcast and sinners of all kinds, not to mention the threat to those in power and Jesus' coming death that John's own death foreshadowed.

Jesus clearly took John's preaching and ministry seriously and therefore so must I – as much as I'd like to smooth out the rough and uncomfortable edges. Yes, John executes his job with a bit of a bite! But if we look, he also offers hope! The One who is coming will baptize you with the Holy Spirit! I don't think it's a stretch to say that those listening didn't have a clue about all of the power and ability to help co-create kingdom of peace that was about to arrive at their doorstep.

And I think it is there where John's sense of urgency, his passion, his seriousness lies. It's clear to him the world around him needed that peace – the suffering and oppression of those around him was clear. He needed them to know,

and to be filled with hope, that this new age, this new way the Christ Child ushers in, is gonna be a completely different way of organizing their lives – of seeing and responding to the world. That they would no longer be without a sense of peace or want or suffering.

As far as he was concerned, whatever it took to get this urgent message across, he was willing to do (right down living far away from the central city of Jerusalem to send a message to the powers that be and eating whatever he could find to stay alive while doing so). He'd been tasked with a job; and he was going to do it!

Perhaps it's tempting to think what John pointed to almost 2000 years ago looks really different in our modern world. In reality though, I think it is quite similar; no matter the time or place, learning to see with the eyes of Christ, sight filled with love and compassion, is always needed.

If seeing ourselves and others with the eyes of Christ is what John's job was, how do we do that ... how do we experience that? All I can offer is what I glimpse from time to time ... it is this. When I can feel/sense/let in the love God has for me and all that God has entrusted to me (to each of us through the Holy Spirit) my inner acceptance of my own "beloved-ness" (this is the "like yourself" part of the Greatest Commandment) fills my heart – and doubts fears, worries, "what ifs" fade.

It starts right in my heart.

It starts when we can more deeply accept the love of Christ, as a symbol of our "beloved-ness" and worthiness, and in taking that in we find there is plenty to share. I find I can offer that love to those in my inner circle, then to those at Saint Andrew's and then into the wider community. Knowing that if I am God's beloved, so are others. We do this over and over and over, practice, practice --

And bit by bit the stranger, even the enemy, can be seen with the eyes of Christ --- and the wolf is found lying next to the lamb and the lion eats straw like the ox. This is the Power of the one John declares is coming after him. This is what we are making space for on Christmas morn, and it a little child who will lead us.