

Become Christ's Prophet
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John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 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.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." 28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

What does it mean to you to be comfortable in your own skin?

I used to believe that being completely comfortable with who you are was something that happened at adulthood. It was just part of growing up. Now that I am well into that project, I know better! A friend of mine likes to remind me that, no matter how old we are, we all revert to our middle school selves when we are in crowd of strangers. And I think that's true. My awkward middle school self tends to show up when I'm under stress. It takes a very self aware, self possessed person to be comfortable in his or her own skin. We always find ourselves admiring and envying such people.

Jesus' cousin John was just such a person. He knows who he is. He knows who he isn't. He knows the work he is to do. And he knows the work that is for someone else. John was calling people into a new social movement – a new society – and he was baptizing them as an initiation into a new citizenship. So it made sense that some people were sizing him up to be the promised Messiah – the one sent from God to restore Israel to its former glory. At this point John doesn't know who the Messiah is, but he knows one thing for sure: It ain't him. There is a such a joy – such a freedom! – in knowing who you aren't!

John knew he was setting the stage for the main event. He was the warm up act for the soon-to-be-introduced headliner. Steeped in the scriptures, he took his cues from the prophet Isaiah who had said some 500 years earlier...

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ”

He was just a voice. But it was a clear voice. An unequivocal voice. A voice calling people to turn away from empty rituals and self-absorbed institutions. A voice calling people to wake up, take stock, and choose better. A voice telling people to clear a path for the Lord, the One they had been waiting for, to arrive. John was a loud voice. A bold voice. But he was still *just a voice*.

YOU have a voice. What do you long to cry out to the world? What is one thing you know for certain, the one thing you could say that you know is absolutely true not because you read it in a book or saw it on TV or heard it from an expert but because you have lived it, and breathed it, and allowed that truth to define you and move you through life.

If someone put a microphone in front of you and asked, “What is the one thing the world should know?” What would you say?

When people speak from this place, they are no longer just people with an opinion. They are prophets. Prophets speak the truth. They speak it regardless of whether or not people want to hear it. They speak the same truth regardless of the audience - to those at the top and those at the bottom. Prophets know who they are, and what they are committed to. In fact,

Prophets are so clear about what they are committed to
that they make everyone around them
get clear about what they are committed to.

As the crises becomes more acute, prophetic voices become clearer. Climate change, racial injustice, the canyon-sized gap between the rich and the poor, a global pandemic – take your pick – the prophetic voice is the one that calls it like she sees it, calls the rest of us out for being complacent about it, and calls us to action. Sometimes prophetic voices are loud and angry, like Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager calling attention to climate change. Sometimes they are measured and calm like Dr. Anthony Fauci, the American doctor warning about surging cases of Covid-19. Thunberg points to the weather, Fauci points to the research, John the Baptist points to the Kingdom, and each of them has made peace with the who they are, who they aren’t, and why they are compelled.

This morning, I am calling on you to be a prophet. I am calling on you to get so clear about what you are committed to that it causes everyone around you to get clear about what they are committed to. I am calling on you to become single-minded as to what or to whom the entirety of your life will draw the world’s attention. I am calling on you to get more comfortable in your own skin by getting clearer about what God has placed in your own heart. Jesus would call John

“the greatest of the Prophets,” but he was the only one or the last one. I am calling on us see ourselves as minor prophets. Like John, we can come to accept that it’s not about us. It’s about Jesus. We can discover the joy and the freedom that comes with making it all about Christ, about pointing to him and directing attention to him with every part of our lives.

John was asked, “What do you say about yourself?” And John knew the answer. He knew it in his bones.

What is true about you because of God’s claim on your life?
What do you know for certain, and what can you acknowledge that you don’t know?

Illustration: My experience telling my kids, post divorce: You can trust Jesus.

How about you? What do you say about yourself as far Jesus is concerned?
Answer this question in your own words. And then pay attention to how it feels to live inside that, to become more comfortable with the truth and with yourself in it – knowing that you don’t have to know more, or be more, than you are. Then you will be able to: **Live the truth of who Jesus is to you out loud**, like John does.

Amen.