

The role of John the Baptist in St Luke's Gospel is rather like that of the "Warm-up Act" to the Main Show. The main show being brought to us by Jesus.

St Luke tells us that John *proclaimed the good news to the people*. Luke 3.18

The challenge for us today, is: just how do we *proclaim the good news to the people* with whom we live and work and study?

Most of the people we know do not come to Trinity Church, or join us on Zoom on a Sunday morning.

So where are they? We meet them in the neighbourhood, or at Work, or at School. We can pray for them night and day. But where are they when it comes to sharing in the Gospel?

In the time of John the Baptist, people were aware of God; but they seemed to be in a wilderness of life – unsure of what they were supposed to do.

In our time most people know about the Main Show brought to us by Jesus, but often they are also in a wilderness of life. For us life is full of difficult challenges. I often wonder how people get by in life without Jesus.

But there are some ideas in the gospel reading this morning that will help us think about what *we* can do to be like John the Baptist. Can we be the Jesus “Warm-up Act” for the people we know?

To help me with these ideas I have recruited three present day John the Baptists – Pamela, Jan, and Manju. They are going to show how John the Baptist’s advice can be made good for people today.

In the reading people asked John what they should do. And he gave them some good advice. So when people ask *us* about our faith, we need to understand where they are coming from, and make sure our answers *proclaim the good news to them*.

Pamela

“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.
Luke 3:10 & 11.

John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none and anyone who has food should do the same”.

This is probably the easiest section to put into practice in our situation as the Dutch set up does a lot of the hard work for us. They even drop bags like this one through our letter box and ask us to fill them with clothes and then set it out on the pavement and they will come and pick it up again. The effort on our part is actually not that much. We have just had Sinterklaas and Christmas is approaching. We get and have SO much and this is a very small way in which we can share out of the plenty that we have to help those who have less. The society around us is already enabling this to happen, but who call ourselves Christians can be trailblazers and set an example of generosity in this area.

Then when it comes to food – I found out just this week that pretty much all the major food stores whether physical or online have ‘food cards’ we can purchase along with our own shopping which buys a food packet of non-perishable foods which then get distributed to refugees, homeless people, and others in need. Again, the set-up of our local and national organisations actually make this so straightforward for us but the challenge is to take the time and pay the extra to share out of our wealth.

We can go beyond the bags through the letter box and buying food packet vouchers to help support the many agencies both locally and internationally who strive to help feed the hungry and provide clothing for the poor and needy.

Let us demonstrate our sharing of the gospel in these practical ways as John encouraged us to do. In our words and actions.

Jan

Even tax collectors came to John the Baptist to be baptized. And they also asked the question: “What should we do?” And John said to them: “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”

We still have tax collectors, don't we?

Do you recognise this letter head? It usually comes to you in the famous, or should I say 'infamous' blue envelope.

It can be about tax you have to pay or even tax you get back.

In recent years thousands of people were very much in fear of these blue envelopes. Following the so called “Social Security Supplements Act”, in Dutch “de kinderopvangtoeslagen wet”, many people had to pay back thousands of euros because the tax collectors acted as the tax collectors in John the Baptist's times. The tax collectors lost sight of 'humane treatment' and called honest people 'fraudulent'. Even the highest Court in the country apologized for this! Wrong mentality, having a problem with institutional integrity.

Manju

Among the crowds who have come to be baptized or listen to John the Baptist are some soldiers. They, as well ask the question:” What should we do?” They probably believe in God or are aware of God and want to do right but operate day to day in an irrational and logically inconsistent manner. John asks them not to

- Extort money by threats or false accusation
- And to be content with their wages

Who are the equivalent soldiers of our day?

- Bullies in schools who pick on and make fun of others, or take things by force
- colleagues who dump their work onto you and take credit for it or steal your ideas.
- Police or officials who take bribes

How do we proclaim the Good News to them?

God’s Word through John calls for repentance. Repentance is where salvation begins. There is no understanding of the Gospel without understanding of sin and repentance. They too are able to live in love and peace in the position

they have in this world if they receive the Good news.

Malcolm

Pamela, Jan and Manju have shown that each of us can look back at John the Baptist, and admire his advice. People back then knew about God, but they needed advice as to how to turn their knowledge into action.

In our society today, people know what are the right things to do; this is shown in the fact that Governments around the world have provided many rules to make sure people know it is wrong to be selfish, or greedy, or bullying. For instance the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a very Christian inspired development in modern life. Even so, people find that life remains a challenge. It is as if they are a wilderness of life wondering what to do.

Each of *us* deals with the challenge of life by our faith in God, who has shown his love for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are the ones who have found that there can be peace in life as we live in the

Spirit of God. People around us see this; they wonder what it is we are on. Secretly, they want some of it. This gives us the opportunity *to proclaim the good news* of our faith in Jesus.

Our job is to share this faith with the people around us. Every one of us is a potential John the Baptist, pointing out to people that they know what is the right thing to do, and pointing to our faith in Jesus.

We need to study the role of John the Baptist, and practise to be the “Warm-up Act”, pointing to Jesus as the main event. In this way we bring Jesus on to life’s stage, and tell the good news for the people we know in our Neighbourhood, or our Work-place, or our School.

The people we know often find themselves in a wilderness in their lives; they will benefit when we *proclaim the good news to them* and show them that they too are very close to the kingdom of God.