

“John the Witness”

January 18, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: John 1: 29-42

I went through a stage when I refused to call John the Baptist, John the Baptist. I called him John the Baptizer. It is silly I know, but there were and still are people who believed that John the Baptist was called that because he was a Baptist, as in, he belonged to the Baptist Church. There were even some practicing Baptists who believed their church traced its history to John the Baptist. Of course neither of those are true. John had been dead for one and a half thousand years before the Baptist Church came into existence. So to clear up any possible confusion, I just referred to him as John the Baptizer. And on occasion I still do. But after reading the first chapter of the Gospel of John – which is not about nor written by John the Baptist baptizer – I think we need to change his name all together. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell of John baptizing crowds of people, and more specifically, baptizing Jesus. But in the Gospel of John, we are not privy to Jesus’ baptism. It is not described to us. It does not even say for sure that John is the one who baptized Him. Because in the gospel of John, John’s job is more of a witness than a baptist. Verses 6-7, just a little before our reading, say, “There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light.” And when Jesus came to be baptized, we don’t read anything John did, but rather what he saw. Starting in verse 32 of our reading. “And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Jesus. I myself did not know Him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.” John’s role is a witness. He tells us what he knows – that Jesus is the Chosen One, and how he knows it – he saw the Spirit descend and stay on Jesus.

And he doesn’t seem to be able to stop. It is almost as if John can’t help but point people to Jesus. It is the day after Jesus’ baptism and John the witness saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” “The next day,” says verse 35, “John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’” After hearing John’s witness, his two disciples started following Jesus. When Jesus noticed these new guys following Him, He turned and asked, “‘What are you looking for?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi... where are you staying?’” “Where are you staying?” is kind of a strange opening question, but think about it for a moment. They called Him Rabbi, which means teacher, which means they are interested in becoming a couple of His students, or disciples. They are asking to move from being disciples of John the witness to being disciples of Jesus, the Lamb of God. And what do disciples do? They live their life with the one they are following. They stay with them, do what they do, follow them where they go, learn to be like them. Saying “Rabbi, where are you staying?” is asking if they can come and

follow Him, stay with Him, learn from Him, learn to be like Him. Jesus graciously invites them to “Come and see.”

John the Gospel writer uses John the Baptist or rather John the witness to establish a system that has held for 2000 years. It starts with John the witness telling 2 of his friends, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” Those two go meet Jesus, spend some time with Him, and soon recognize Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. Then one of them, Andrew, goes and tells his brother Simon Peter about Jesus and says come and see. Peter comes and meets Jesus, and he becomes a follower. In the very next verse after our reading, Jesus finds Philip. Then “Philip found Nathanael and said... Come and see.” Nathanael meets Jesus and becomes a follower. Again in chapter 4 when Jesus meets the woman at the well. She spends some time with Jesus, recognizes Him as the chosen One of God, then goes back to town proclaiming “come and see”. And the people came, met Jesus, and believed.

That has been the way it works for 2000 years now. More people come to church for the first time because a friend or family member invited them, than every other reason combined. Those people come and meet Jesus when the Word is proclaimed, and come to know Him as Savior and friend. Then they go invite a friend or family member to come meet Jesus. If you combine all the church signs, all the websites, all the radio, newspaper, and media advertising, all those who wander in the door because of the congregation’s reputation or minister’s preaching or music or youth and children’s ministry; if you combine all those together, a person is still twice as likely to come to church for the first time because a friend or family member invited them. It has never changed from the model in this first chapter of John. John the witness invited two friends to meet Jesus. They came and God moved within them. One of those friends invited his brother to meet Jesus. He came, God moved in him and we have at least 2 of the 12 disciples.

“Come and see” Jesus says to John the witness’ friends. “Come and see” Andrew says to Peter. “Come and see” Philip says to Nathanael. “Come and see” the Samaritan woman says to her neighbors. “Come and see,” we say to our friend. And they say, “Why? If I want to know information about Jesus, I will look it up online. If I want to sing along with some songs, I will look up my favorites on YouTube. If I have an hour to kill, I will watch an old TV show. And besides, I have stuff to do – and yes, sleeping-in counts as something to do.”

How do we respond? Well, first a few ways not to respond. Don’t dig your heals in for an argument, because then the goal becomes winning the argument as opposed to winning the person. Calm, patient questions work better than confrontive arguments. Questions like “Do you ever wonder why so many people go to church, even give so much money to church? Any idea what they find there?” It must be something big. Second way not to respond, forcing them to believe exactly as you do without acknowledging their questions and doubts. Help them

think things through with more questions and help them realize doubt is not a bad thing, but a motivator. You can say, “this is how I understand that or deal with that” but respect them to work it through. When you don’t know an answer to a question, simply say, “I don’t know.” Honesty is awesome. No need to force things. They have to make the decision to follow Jesus themselves. You cannot make it for them. The third don’t is don’t throw Scripture at them in judgement but lead in compassion. They need to know you care. Use Scripture to build them up, not tear them down. You are inviting them to “come and see”.

Make it a FOMO moment. Hook their FOMO. FOMO stands for “fear of missing out”. Help them see what they are missing. The first thing you want to do is live out your faith to the fullest. Live that peace that passes understanding. Live your “even if” faith. Even if things do not go like I want them, I’m okay. Even if the doctor gives me bad news, I’m still okay. Even if someone rejects me, I’m okay. Even if God doesn’t answer my prayer, I’m okay. Even if my heart is broken, and I lose my job, I will still have my peace, still worship God, still trust in Jesus, still bring my offering, still sing God’s praises and still love my neighbor as myself. I want them to see in me that they are missing something. Then pray. Pray for them consistently because God is the One who has to make things happen. Pray one more time. Then gently inquire: is there something more you are missing out on? Is there more to life? Are you missing a sense of fulfillment, peace, happiness, joy? Is the life you dreamed of still eluding you? Are your disappointments and hurts still pulling you down? There is more. “Come and see” there is more. “Come and see” the way to a peace that passes understanding. “Come and see” unconditional love that lifts and upholds. “Come and see” a light that continues to shine even in the darkness of disappointment, hurt and brokenness. “Come and see” a way through this life that doesn’t end in diminished capabilities, loneliness and death. “Come and see” the more Jesus has for you.

“But I don’t believe like you do,” they say. “I don’t believe in God or Jesus or any of that stuff.” I didn’t either,” you respond. You learn it, and the only way to learn it, to believe it, to trust it, is to “come and see”. Romans 10:17 reminds us faith comes from hearing – from exposing ourselves to God’s word and God’s heart. “Come and see.”

Mike Van Heyningen