

"John the Doppelganger"

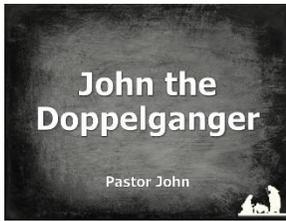
December 17, 2017

Scripture: John 1: 1-6 and 19-28

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John... 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.



Last week we looked at John the Baptist as a model that we could emulate, answering the call that God has for each of us to go forth to help prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. Our role is to help others prepare their lives so that they too can receive the good news of Jesus Christ. Last week we also remembered our baptisms as a reminder that even though we are called to share our faith, we too need to remember our limitations. We too are like John, just a voice calling out in the wilderness that is totally reliant on the life-changing power of God and the Holy Spirit to be what works in a person's heart, changing them into the new creation that God intends them to be as a follower of Jesus Christ. We took a small rock and I challenged you to carry it in your pocket as a reminder of the call that God has on each of our lives to be witnesses to our faith, sharing how Jesus has made a difference in our lives so that others could see how He could make a difference in their lives as well. It answers the question that I posed last week: What difference does your faith make in your life? What difference did it make in another's life this past week? Let us pray.



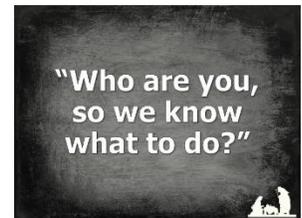
Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines "doppelganger" as a 'double' or 'alter ego'. The word itself is of German origin and literally means "double-goer". We probably are familiar with this term – we think of our doppelganger as someone who looks just like us. Sometimes we can even confuse one person for another. My favorite example of this idea is the State Farm commercials featuring Chris Paul and his separated-at-birth brother "Cliff", who later get reconnected in life. They look alike but are so different.





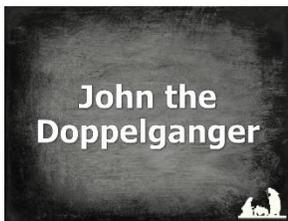
An identity crisis is the crux of our passage from John today. The priests and Levites come out to see John to try and figure out just who he is. There are two reasons they come. First, the Jews have been waiting for a Messiah for a long time.

The last prophet came over 400 years ago so the chosen people are eager for a word from God. And for eons before Malachi last spoke to the Israelites in 400 BC, they have been hearing over and over that God will send a Messiah. So, when John appears and seems like a prophet or maybe the One, they come out into the wilderness to see if the Messiah has finally come. The second reason that they are coming out is to know how to deal with whomever this is. They need to know what they are dealing with in order to best deal with it. They ask, "Who are you, so we know what to do"?



The Gospel of John begins not with John the Baptist, but with Jesus. John was not only aware of the current religious leaders' confusion but was also aware that future readers of his gospel, such as us, might be confused as well. John the gospel writer begins by establishing just who Jesus was, is, and will be. In the beginning was the Word. The Word is Jesus. All things came into being through Jesus. He was the light of all people. Jesus continues to be the light that shines into the darkness. Jesus will always be the light that shines into the darkness. The darkness did not and will not ever overcome the light. For John, his gospel is all about establishing the divine nature of Jesus Christ. So, John begins by connecting Jesus back to the Genesis account and creation and extends Jesus into the present and future as well – the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Once again, the now and not yet of our faith.

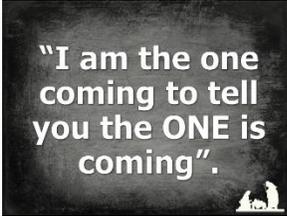
As we continue in our passage, though, we must remember that the priests and Levites do not have John's gospel to read before heading out to see John the Baptist. And we must remember, too, that Jesus has not really begun his ministry, so they are not aware that the Messiah is indeed alive. But they do have John, out there in the wilderness, acting like one who has very much been sent by God. He is calling people to repent of their sins and to prepare themselves for the coming of the kingdom of God. The people are going out in droves to see John, to repent, to be baptized, to rededicate themselves to the Lord. In order to find out who and what John the Baptist really is, the religious leaders send out priests and Levites to find out. They begin by simply asking John, "*Who are you?*" and John confesses plainly, "*I am not the Messiah*". So, the priests and Levites continue the questioning. Are you Elijah? Are you another prophet? No and no. Well, then they say, tell us who you are, so that we can go back with an answer for those who sent us. Just tell us who you are!



In answering their question, John the Baptist returns to the Old Testament, to the prophet Isaiah, to someone these priests and Levites would certainly know and understand.

Isaiah wrote around 730 B.C. – about 760 years before what takes place in today's story. This again reinforces the fact that the people have been waiting a long, long time. They desperately want John to be the Messiah. This is partly why John was seen as a doppelganger. Have you ever waited so long for something that it almost hurt? It is like that friend you knew who wanted to be married so, so badly. Every romantic possibility that came along, we would ask, "Is this the one? Will it finally happen?" This is where many of the chosen

people find themselves. John is not the first prophet to appear on the horizon. There have been false prophets and other leaders who have risen up to try and lead Israel, only to be killed or imprisoned by the Romans or whatever foreign power was ruling Israel at the time. They so want him to be the one. But John answers them with a quote from Isaiah, saying, *"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'"*. He is saying that he is the 760-year-old answer to their waiting. He is saying, "I am the one who is coming to tell you the ONE is coming". Of course, they do not hear this.



"I am the one coming to tell you the ONE is coming".

As our scripture continues, they pose another question to John the Baptist. They want to know if he is not the one, then why is he out there in the wilderness. They need something to tell the bosses back in Jerusalem. They ask him, *"Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"* In essence, they are asking, "Well then, John, if you are not any of these people, just what are you doing out here in the wilderness"? And just as they did not hear John's answer for the prophet Isaiah as to who he was, he chooses not to hear their question. Instead he responds to the deep-felt need for the Messiah that sent them out there in the first place, saying cryptically,



"Among you stands one whom you do not know".

"Among you stands one whom you do not know". John is saying that the Messiah is already here, you just do not know it yet.

This is right where many people are today, isn't it? They long for something or someone to make life better. They long for what is missing in their life. They long to fill that hole in their spirit. They sense that there must be more than simply 'this'. But what? *"Among you stands one whom you do not know"*.

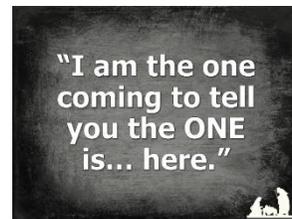
[Play video: "Christmas Connection" (2:04)]



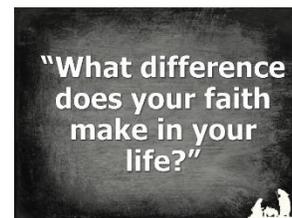
We return here to the big picture of God's plan to save the world. Yes, the baby Jesus did grow up to walk on water. And, yes, that Jesus did come to die on the cross. Yes, that is the same Jesus who lives in our heart. And yes, that is the same Jesus who continues to shine the light into the darkness of our lives and into the dark corners of the world. Yes, Christmas is part of the ongoing story of God's big plan of salvation.

John's response to the priests and Levites' question about his identity is one we need to hear as well. So, hear again his response: *"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'"*. John is there to testify to the one who is to come. As disciples, we are also called to be a voice calling out in the wilderness, testifying to the coming of Christ. In calling out into the wilderness, we become Jesus' doppelganger. In helping to shine the light into the darkness, we become Jesus' double. John's answer that said, "I am

the one who is coming to tell you the ONE is coming" is not quite our version. Our version is "I am the one who is coming to tell you the ONE is... here".



When we testify to our faith, we must testify that Jesus is alive here and now. He is the one who stands among us. He is one who is active and present in every moment of our lives. We return again to this question: What difference does your faith make in your life? How is your life testifying to the one who stands among us? When



people look at our life - when they see us and when they hear our words and when we interact with them - they should see and hear and experience Jesus and come to know Jesus. The question we must ask is this: "Do they?" Do others see Jesus in you and you in Jesus?

There are many in our lives who do not know the One who stands among us, the One who calls out to all of us. They are searching for Jesus and, like the priests and Levites and the Pharisees who sent them to ask John who he was, they do not know this Jesus. They do not know the Jesus who was a humble servant, the one who knelt down to wash the disciple's feet, the one who took on flesh and walked among us, the one who went to the cross for our sins. They do not know the compassionate Jesus, the one who healed the blind and the lame, the one who cured the leper, the one who raised the widow's son. They do not know the loving Jesus, the one who spoke to the woman at the well, the one

who told the story of a neighbor who stopped to help a man beaten by robbers. They do not know the forgiving Jesus, the one who released the woman who was about to be stoned, the one who set free the woman who washed his feet with her tears, the one who changed the hearts of Nicodemus and Zacchaeus and so many more. Do you know people who need to know this Jesus? Do you know people who need to know the One that stands among us?

Our Advent study this week focuses in on living a down to earth lifestyle. Last week the study centered around living a down to earth humility, the kind of humility that Jesus lived out from the moment He took on flesh to the moment He went to the cross for you and me. It spoke of humility as thinking less of ourselves and instead thinking more of others. This is what Jesus did throughout His ministry and it is what He meant when He asked us to die to self so we could live for Him. As followers of Christ, we are called to live out His down to earth humility. We see example after example of what this means as we read through story after story about Jesus healing and teaching and modeling what it looked like to feed the poor, to care for the orphan and widow, to love the least of these.

This week our study calls us to take this humility and to live it out as our down to earth lifestyle. It means living a faith-based life. It means doing the things that Jesus did. It means loving others more than self. It means being a humble servant and seeing others as Jesus saw them, then responding as Jesus would have responded. If we do so, then people will come to know the One who

stands among them. They will know Him as friend and companion, as servant and partner. And, yes, one day they will come to know Him as Lord and Savior too. One day, one day.

Until then, as disciples of the living Savior, may we bear witness to the One who stands among us, offering hope and love and healing and redemption and compassion and so much more to a world in need. May our lives testify to Jesus, our Savior and the Savior of the world. May those we cross paths with this week see Jesus in us and, as they see Jesus in us, may they come to know Jesus too. May it be so this week. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What one thing could you do this week to help others better see Jesus in you? Do not stop here. Go out and live it out!
- 2) Who do you know that needs to know the One who stands among us? Spend some time in prayer each day for this person to know Jesus.
- 3) How can you “be” Jesus this week? Is it in feeding the hungry, is it in visiting one who is lonely, is it in loving the unlovable? Now go do it!