



Do the names Joseph Lister or John Harington mean anything to you? Ever heard of them? Most of us haven't, and yet they've each had remarkable impact on our lives.

If you've ever had surgery and lived to tell the tale, you should thank Dr. Joseph Lister. He is the physician who came up with wild ideas like doctors washing their hands before surgery, wearing clean clothes, and sterilizing surgical instruments in the late 19th century. Those protocols were revolutionary in his day and have saved countless lives ever since. His name is nearly forgotten today...except for this [Listerine], the mouthwash that still bears his name.

How about John Harington? Sir John Harington to be more proper. Ever heard of him? Chances are you haven't. He was a poet and a translator in the late 16th century. You've probably never read his poems, but chances are good that today you've utilized one of his inventions. Sir John Harington invented the flush toilet. If you've ever wondered why a bathroom is sometimes called "The John" it's because it was named after John Harington.

The world is filled with people whose names we'll probably never know, but whose lives profoundly and positively impacted the lives of others. And at the same time this world is filled with people whose names we do know, people whose faces grace magazine covers and television screens today, but who will be utterly forgotten in 50 years, let alone 500. In today's scripture reading we're going to see that very thing, and we're going to be encouraged to be among those who positively impact the lives of others humbly blessing them.

So, open your bible to Luke 3:1-3, 15-16 and let's read it together, and I want you to pay particular attention to the names in this lesson.

I grew up in a church in which lay people volunteered to read the scripture lesson each week. This is one of those lessons volunteers hoped they never got. All these crazy, exotic names – Tiberius, Lysanias, Herod Antipas and Annas. Most of us have no idea who those people are, nor do we recognize the regions they're identified with. But Luke's original audience knew them. To them, these were very familiar names. In fact, they were a quick "who's who" of the political and religious elites of the day. I suspect that Luke included them in his Gospel for a couple of reasons. He wanted to locate the story of Jesus in history, and he throughout his Gospel Luke will tell us that following Jesus has both political and religious implications.

But here's what I want you to notice. While all of those names were familiar to people in the first century, the main characters of this story [holding up the bible] – Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah and especially John the Baptist – were not familiar names. They were ordinary people - just faces in the broad sweep of ancient humanity. And yet 2,000 years later no one remembers the names of the rich and famous – Tiberius, Lysanias and Herod Antipas. But we all know John the Baptist. John's life changed the world.

We could say a lot about John the Baptist. He was a pretty colorful figure! But I want to draw your attention to just one thing about John: his humility. Yes, John the Baptist was bold. Yes, he spoke hard truth to the religious leaders of his day. But John was a humble man. Think about that moment in our lesson today when the crowds asked John if he was the messiah. John had suddenly become a very popular figure. He had charisma. The people responded to him and they followed him in droves. John was leading a popular and growing movement. That kind of popularity can expand your ego. Can't you just imagine John thinking, "I am kind of a big deal. Look at these crowds following me. Maybe I am the messiah!" But that's not how John responded. Take a moment to underline John's response in verse 16, "I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals." What a remarkable response. Can you imagine a Hollywood star or a prominent political figure today saying of some up-and-coming star or leader, "Oh, there's someone so much better than me coming up the ranks. I'm not even worthy to be their publicity agent." That's not likely to happen. That kind of humility is rare. But that's the kind of humility John had.

Humility isn't about denying our gifts or magnifying our faults. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself than you should. Humble people don't actually think about themselves much at all. Humble people think about the needs of others and how God can meet those needs through them. Humble people offer who they are and what they have to God's service. That's what John did, and God changed lives through him. And I believe that that's how God wants to positively impact the lives of others.

Think back on your own life. Think about the people who have had a profoundly positive impact on you. Think about the people who have brought out the best in you, the people who have made you better, invested in you or helped you to navigate a difficult time. Bring someone to mind right now. I'm willing to bet that they were not rich and famous and powerful. I'm willing to bet that they were ordinary people just like you and me, whom God used in extraordinary ways.

So many "ordinary" people like that have had an extraordinary impact in my life. A man named Peter comes to mind. Peter is an executive coach, a guy who helps leaders navigate challenges. I met regularly with Peter during my first year here at Prince of Peace. He was a great listener, a great encourager. On days when I was afraid I was drowning in treacherous waters Peter was a lifeline. I often walked into Peter's office feeling like I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, but always left feeling lighter. At the end of that year I remember saying, "Peter, we still haven't gotten a bill for your work, and I need to know how much to budget for next year." Peter just smiled and responded, "You're not going to get a bill. And I'm going to charge you exactly the same amount next year." What a gift of grace. A humble man whom God used in a powerful way in my life.

What humble people has God used to powerfully impact your life? I'd like to hear just a few stories this morning. Who'd be willing to share? [I'll walk around with a microphone at all services and catch two or three stories... and will probably prime the pump with one brief one at each service to set the right tone].

You know what's pretty amazing? If we were to tell the humble people in our lives the profound impact they've had upon us, do you know what they'd say? They'd say, "What? Who? Me? I didn't do anything!" Humble people usually aren't even aware of what God is doing through them to bless the lives of others. I'm guessing that was even true of John the Baptist.

This week I want to challenge you to become even more aware of the fact that that's true for you too. I don't how God will use you. What I do know is that God does use ordinary, humble people just like you and me to change the world by impacting one life at a time. And that journey begins by humbly coming before the Lord and saying, "God, I'm yours. I commit all that I am and all that I have to serving you by serving those around me. Open my eyes to see. Open my hands to serve. Open my heart to love." You'll find that prayer on the back of your worship folder with the Daily Scripture Readings. Pray it each morning, and see what God through you. Let's begin the journey by praying together right now.....