

August 10 & 11, 2024

Will You Go to

Homecoming with Me? | *The Voice*

John 1:19-34

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It seems that fall is already here. Ads for back-to-school supplies are everywhere. Our family ministry team is getting ramped up for fall ministry. We are taking our daughter back to college this week. Before long there will be college football and we will hear phrases like, "Are you going to homecoming?" Or "Who are you going to homecoming with?". These are phrases that we know well and if you are in high school, those are phrases that might just create some anxiety.

A couple of years ago, my wife and I were home, and we were able to witness one of those rituals that our young people go through. Now, this wasn't a homecoming proposal it was a promposal, but the process is still the same. A young man pulled up alongside our lawn and at the same time our daughter walked out of the house to meet him. We recognized this young man and so we thought that he was dropping something off, until we saw him pull out a poster from the car and walk over to our daughter with a rose. We both immediately tried something to hide behind so we could not be seen watching this ritual, but also someplace where we could watch this ritual.

They talked for a few minutes, and she walked back in the house. And... the first words out of our mouths were "What happened?". And then she told us that he asked her to go with him. (sign)

This young man mustered all the strength he had to use his voice to ask my daughter to go with him. I remember those days. Trying to muster up the fortitude to you my voice to ask someone to go with me, to prom, to homecoming, to basically anything. I can clearly remember times when my voice didn't work, and some strange sound would squeak out of my mouth.

Having a voice is critical and not just in those kinds of situations, but in more dangerous times as well.

It's so critical that when dictators come to power one of the first things they try to do is take away other voices. Typically, it's the voice of the people; the voices of poets, singers, artists, news media and even religious voices. Our voices can be very powerful.

You and I are also deeply impacted by the voice that we hear about in today's scripture. It's the voice of John the Baptist. And make no mistake about it. John is using his voice to make the biggest of all proposals. The one proposal that has and does change the world.

John 1:19-34

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "what then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. ²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I 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.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John's voice points to Jesus as the Son of God, the chosen one of God. But why does John's voice matter? John was considered by many to be a prophet, someone who was calling the people to repentance, to a cleansing baptism. His appearance, a camel hair tunic with a leather belt and a strict diet of locust and wild honey reminded the people of the prophets of old from hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Those prophets spoke of coming messiah's could this one too represent the new King David, the new messiah, the new savior. He walked like a prophet, he talked like a prophet - maybe, just maybe he was. And nothing was more powerful than the voice of a prophet.

The voice of a prophet not only spoke truth about current reality, but a prophet spoke truth to power, and the voice of a prophet also spoke into the future, a future promise of hope. So, when John the Baptist is questioned by the religious power base about his own identity, John confesses that he is not the one that the prophets have all be pointing too, but that Jesus is the one – and in pointing out Jesus as the one John's voice changes the world.

That's how powerful voices are. That's how powerful your voice is. Now hold on... you may be saying to yourself... I'm no John the Baptist. And you are right... you are not... you can even clothe yourselves in camel hair and eat locust and wild honey (*like some have tried to do*) and you won't be John the Baptist. But being John the Baptist is not the point. Realizing that your voice can help change the world is the point.

You and I encounter lots of people every week who are desperate to hear your voice. To hear your voice that points to love and hope; to hear your voice that acknowledges their current reality; a voice that stands with them in their pain, in their suffering. A voice that will even help them reflect; a voice that will point to a new future; a voice that will connect them to community; and a voice that will help them find their own voice.

And again, you may be saying – that doesn't sound like me. I'm just not that extroverted and by the

way we have pastors and staff to do that kind of thing. Well... if you look at the history of Jesus and the movement that Jesus starts, Jesus doesn't start the movement with a bunch of "pastors and staff". Actually, the Jesus movement was opposed by the "pastors and staff". Why? Well one of the reasons was that the "pastors and staff" were too busy trying to maintain and follow a bunch of rules. And when the rules become more important than people, you start losing the people.

So, who cares if you are not extroverted or know everything that you think you should know about God and faith stuff. If you notice in the story the first thing that John does is confess who he is not. He is not the expert. He is not Elijah or the Messiah. He is simply a voice. So... be real with who you are not. You are not Elijah or Messiah either. Pressures off... you are a voice. All that you need is to be prepared to use your voice.

And if you notice in the story the people with the questions, come to John. He didn't run around looking for people to answer a question that didn't have. And in my experience, that's how the Holy Spirit works. The Holy Spirit does the work of opening the possibility; we need to be ready to use our voice. And when our voice doesn't answer every question look to John again. He didn't sit down with those folks and hammer out every issue. His voice simply pointed – to Jesus – to love, to hope, to community because that's what Jesus is. Jesus brings love and hope and that is usually found within community.

Over the next couple of weeks, we are going to be asking you to pray about using your voice to invite someone to come with you to worship the weekend of September 7/8. It's like asking someone to come to homecoming with you. You don't have to make a sign or bring a rose... but that might be nice. All you have to do is show up in someone's life and invite them to come somewhere where you are already going. You are not asking them to do something that you are not willing to do. This is all about going to homecoming together. Who knows, you might even dress a bit

differently. You might even share a meal together. Yes, it might be a bit awkward at times. That's ok.

Remember that you are not the messiah... don't worry about having all the answers. The invitation that is extended throughout the gospel of John is simply – come with me – and then you'll find life. May you claim your own voice and be ready to use it. May you recognize the power of the Holy Spirit creating possibilities for your voice to point others to the love, hope and community of Jesus. And here is the not so secret, secret... we will all join in on the best ever, all-time, grand march of our lives.