

Dec. 30: 1st Sunday in Christmas, New Year's

Message: John the Baptist: Declare! #5: Be Baptized

Scripture: Matt. 3:1-11

Text: Mark 1:4 "John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins."

Theme: New Year's. This verse allows us to frame the upcoming year in light of the Spirit's presence in our lives. Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit! We can live in power and victory!

Memory Verse: Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever doesn't believe will be condemned." -Mark 16:16

Blurb: Ready for 2019? Maybe not just yet! But I think we never will be ready, actually. So, the best thing we can do is commit our past to the past, but make that intentional decision to give 2019 to God. We do that by making a New Year's resolutions to courageously follow Jesus, no matter what the year ahead may bring. This Sunday we'll commit 2019 into God's hands through renewing our baptisms.

Opening Song: *King of Glory* -Sanctify

Welcome: -Pastor David

Memory Verse:

Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever doesn't believe will be condemned." -Mark 16:16

Worship Music Set:

O Come All Ye Faithful

All I Have Is Christ

Restoration

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Offering: *Hands Held High*

Prayers: -Pastor Andrew

Serve Moment: Christmas Camp Recap -Andrew

Message: John the Baptist: Declare! #5: Be Baptized!

PP#1: John the Baptist: Declare! #5: Be Baptized!

Mark 1:4 "John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins."

John the Baptist: Declare! Be Baptized! Mark 1:4 “John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins.”

PP#2: *An older person looking at a new smart phone with questioning and fear*

My sister called me on my land line at home yesterday to tell me that she had just emailed me her new cell number. It seems she got a smart phone for Christmas from her son. Now, my sister is 70 years old and has had a cell phone for years, a flip phone. I clarified, “So, you called me on my home number to tell me to look at my email, where you sent me your new smart phone number? Why not just call my cell...then I would have your new number? Besides, this is the kind of thing you text.” She said, “Yes, texting. I’ve heard about that. I guess with this new phone I’m going to have to learn to do that.” As I visualize my nephew working with my sister trying to get her into the 21st century, I anticipate some pretty hilarious posts that he will be making about her!

I tried to encourage my sister. I told her that once she gets used to her new smart device, she’ll find herself using it for all kinds of things. She whined about how complicated everything was, with all the various things she needed to set up, all the game possibilities, and the endless apps. She was overwhelmed. I told her to relax, work at it, bit by bit, and only try downloading one new thing a day.

Then I gave her the golden nugget of smart device survival. This will save her all kinds of headaches. Are you interested, too? It’s quite simple, actually. At least once a week, completely turn off your device, let it totally cool down, and then turn it back on again from a cold start.

What this does, is shut down all the background programs that have started and apps that are running. As we use our devices, we start up programs, use them a bit, and then we move on to the next thing. But that program keeps running in the background. Apps are turned on, and stay on. Then we start getting those mysterious messages from our dormant programs telling us why we need to use them again. “Your game was just upgraded. Come, play it again!” They eat up our memory, and our devices run slower and slower. When we actually go and look at what’s using our RAM, we’re shocked to find dozens of programs that we haven’t used for days, or weeks! And stuff from the internet has opened on our devices...stuff we didn’t even ask for! Our smart devices aren’t smart enough to say “no!” They’re like a garden that becomes overgrown with weeds!

PP#3: *Image for smart device overwhelmed with apps and programs, perhaps with weeds growing out of it all over?*

Our devices need a fresh start. We need to shut everything off, and start again. Get rid of all those weeds. All those things we tried to do in the past: let them go. And then, our smart devices have the capacity to do what we need them to be doing, what we choose to do, what we want to do.

Let’s do some weeding. Take out your device, and close all the stuff that’s open. Then, are you ready?...locate that obscure power button, then press and hold for five seconds. And when it asks you, “Are you really sure you want to do this? Do you know what you’re doing? Are you sure this isn’t a mistake?” press “yes!” You can do it. Come on. Don’t be afraid. All the way off!

Now, breathe deeply. Can you feel the stress flowing out? Doesn’t that feel good? Leave the device off until worship is over. But let me warn you: when you do start it up again, plan for about 10 minutes of updates to install!

PP#4: *Image for New Year's being a "restart" like a device*

We need to do the same with the rest of our lives. We need a hard restart. We can't just keep everything going, trying to keep up all the stuff we tried in the past and keep adding more and more things we try to do, and letting all that we've done affect what we are trying to do now. We need a restart. And that's what New Year's can be. Let's make New Year's our cold restart this year!

We've been listening to John the Baptist this Christmas. He's an important part of the Christmas story. But just as on our calendar Christmas and New Year are close to each other, so is John's message for Christmas and our new year. We choose Jesus. We choose to worship and follow Jesus. And Christmas starts us on a new beginning. And to do that, we need a cold stop from the way we've been trying to live, and to start new and fresh.

This past year, we've tried to live for Jesus. And sometimes we've gotten it right. Other times we've failed. We've gotten sidetracked. We've started doing things that waste our time and divert our attention. We have activities that are no longer our focus, but we still find ourselves giving time and attention to them, distracting us from the here and now. We hear Jesus calling us to step out in faith and boldly try some things, but we are so drained by what no longer is our passion.

John the Baptist calls to us from the dessert: be baptized! You who have chosen Jesus, come out and restart. Let the waters of baptism wash away your sins, wash away your failures, wash away your past efforts and attempts, wash away what continues to hold you stuck. It's a new year. Jesus has come. We have renewed our commitment to Him. It's time to begin anew.

PP#5: Matt. 3:1-11 (CEB)

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing, 2 "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" 3 He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said: The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight." 4 John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. 5 People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him. 6 As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

Turn to Matthew 3. We've heard part of this passage before. Let's wade a little deeper this time. Matthew 3, beginning with verse one. "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea [Desert is a good image for being more austere, simple, decluttering.] announcing, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said: The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight.' [In order to have room for Jesus, you need to downsize your life. Prepare means getting rid of some stuff! You want to make a straight path for Him to come into your heart. Verse 4,] John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. [He visually suggested a different way, an alternative life. Not that we must be like him, but he is a visual that we don't need all our stuff to be happy.] People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him. As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River."

Baptism was their new start. They wanted more of God. They wanted to follow the Messiah. So, they repented. They confessed their past, their distance from God, their selfish ways of living, and John gave them a hard restart in baptism.

But there are some who may think they're good enough to keep going as is. Perhaps just add more of God in your lives. Try harder. Make more resolutions. Squeeze in some Jesus.

PP#6: Matt. 3:1-11 (CEB)

7 Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, "You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon?
8 Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. 9 And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.

John had stiff words for them! Verse 7, "Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, 'You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? [You don't think you have anything to fear. You think yourselves secure! But you aren't! You need to get back to God, too! Verse 8,] Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. [Don't think yourself safe because you are part of God's chosen people. You're not close to God when you are with others who are close to God. You need to get right with God yourself!] I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.'"

The fruit you bear shows how vital you are as a Jesus-follower. Over time, I fear, we get so clogged doing so many things, that we don't produce the fruit God wants us to. We need to re-prioritize and focus on the main things.

PP#7: Matt. 3:1-11 (CEB)

11 I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 The shovel He uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in His hands. He will clean out His threshing area and bring the wheat into His barn. But He will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

John used baptism as a sign of restarting. Verse 11, "I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The shovel He uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in His hands. He will clean out His threshing area and bring the wheat into His barn. But He will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

Now, I've always read this passage meaning that when the time comes for Jesus to sort people, those who don't choose to follow Him are pulled out and thrown out. Now, for sure that meaning is here. So, if you need to restart by making Jesus your Lord and Savior, don't miss this opportunity. Choose Him! And show that decision in baptism. Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." You'll get a new beginning.

But I also see a connection here between this and what John said how Jesus baptizes with the Spirit and with fire. It's not just sifting *among* people here. I see here also a sifting *within* people! You see, we can't keep following Jesus on our own. Even when we want to, we stumble and fall.

We need help. Notice, John says, that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He gives us the Holy Spirit inside us. And it is by the Holy Spirit within us that we can let go of the past, clean out what is dragging us down, and be empowered to embrace what we are being called to be. We have that cleansing fire within us. It's not just, "I want to stop frittering away my life, I want to stop resorting to anger, I want to stop being so shy and instead build new relationships with new people so I can tell them about Jesus." Left to yourself, you will break your new resolutions.

But we are not left to ourselves! We have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. We have His cleansing fire to burn away what is ungodly. He, within us, sifts the wheat from the husks. He cleans out His threshing area, which is each of us!

This is such good news! It's not up to just us! When we choose Jesus, we have been baptized by His Spirit and cleansing fire!

This is our hope as we come to the new year. We *can* have a new start! We have the Holy Spirit within us to cleans away all the mess and failures and sins of our past year. All that we did wrong in 2018 we don't need to carry into 2019. We can be free from it, through repentance. That means confessing and receiving forgiveness.

PP#8: Reaffirmation of Baptism

Mark 1:4, "John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins." Can you hear him calling to you? Right here?

Let's respond, right now. Let's hold down the power button of our lives and let it all shut down and stop in us. We give up to Jesus all that is in our lives that we don't want. We let it go. Let's do this. Ready? Okay, close your eyes, and put your body in a position of release and surrender. Perhaps put your hands palm up as a sign that you give up what you've been holding, and to show that you receive whatever God gives you. Press the button for five seconds, and open your hearts to Jesus. Confess your sin and ask the Holy Spirit to wash you clean. Let's power down.

[Pause for 5 seconds.]

Holy Spirit, we ask you to sift through our lives. Separate the wheat from the husks. Burn away whatever is ungodly. Shut down in us what should not be running. Turn off wrong desires, wrong attitudes, wrong ways of spending our time. Free us up to be the people you want us to be. Cleanse us and give us a new start. Give us your capacity to live as you want, do what you want, say what you want, go where you want, be who you want. Give us a new start, free from the sins of our past. Free us for joyful obedience, to live boldly into the future you have planned for us.

[Pause.]

PP#9: Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

I'm going to have us to restart in a different way. On the screens is the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. Since the time of John Wesley in the 1700s, Methodists have prayed this prayer on New Year's Eve, as their commitment to live into the new year in a new way. I'm using it in the original older English, as a way for us to stand in line with the generations of Methodists who have gone on before us. And like them, I invite us to pray it through in our hearts, as the way that we turn back on, "powering up" in the Holy Spirit, for the year ahead.

And when you've prayed this through, as a way to respond to John's call of baptism, I invite you to consider reaffirming your baptism. You can do that by coming up front here to the baptism font, dipping your finger into the water, and making the sign of a cross on your hand or forehead, saying, "I remember my baptism." If you've not been baptized, you can simply say, "I hear John's call." And maybe after worship we can talk about getting you baptized. Either way, you can participate. And, you can do it here, now, or you can do it later, sometime before the New Year.

Sit a moment and rest. Be powered off. Let the cleansing happen. Then, power up by praying this Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. It will start you on a brand new path, trust me! And as your response to John's calling to be baptized, come forward and reaffirm your baptism.

Let's get ready for a new year. Let's restart.

[Time for people to pray and then come forward to reaffirm their baptisms.]

Closing Song: *Good Christian Friends Rejoice*

Memory Verse:

Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever doesn't believe will be condemned." -Mark 16:16

Announcements: -Pastor David

Wednesday potluck and Family Feud Game Show Evening for all ages!

Benediction: -Pastor David