

SUNDAY WORD

JUNE 11, 2023



Hebrews 11:1 describes Faith as the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Faith is also what moves us to do what God wants – maybe something that is great or something that we have never imagined. We do it because we believe He will lead and empower us.

We are going to learn from the life of John the Baptist. John is the perfect example of a man who had a “muddle-through-kind-of-faith.” John’s faithful obedience to God, and his resolve to fulfill his calling before the Lord, is described by scholars to be straightforward.

The Bible says that John went out into the wilderness, and he was calling out the people, “Repent! Everyone repent! Prepare the way for the Lord!” There were those who responded positively, but there were also skeptics, critics, and haters. Some people were giving him a hard time, but regardless, he felt that he needed to fulfill his calling.

John chose to obey and heed his calling, and the result: amazing things were happening in his ministry. Not only did thousands accept his message, not only was John baptizing a lot of his

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 What are your takeaway lessons from the message, “Muddling Through”?
- 2 How can you relate John the Baptist’s experience to your life?

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followers, but John also got to see the fulfillment of his prophecy about the arrival of the Messiah as one day, as he was baptizing some of his followers, Jesus suddenly showed up and asked John to baptize him.

Surprised at the request of Jesus, John refused at first. But Jesus insisted. After baptizing Jesus and as He was coming out of the water ...

At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:15-17 (NLT)

And John, he got to see and experience all that. It was perhaps the greatest day of his ministry. But on the very next day, he faced another challenge as key members of his inner circle has started to leave him, and instead went to follow Jesus. While he lost many of his followers, multitudes were following Jesus.

Not long after the disciples of John came to him with the news of Jesus' expanding ministry, another group of "disciples" came to see him. They were soldiers under the authority of Herod Antipas, the Roman-appointed ruler over the region where John had been baptizing people.

Now, Herod, basically, had the responsibility to keep the peace in the land... including death to anyone who disturbs it. And because of the multitudes John had drawn to himself over the years, and due to his forceful style of preaching, John, to Herod's mind- had been disturbing the peace in the region. So he was a target.

John publicly criticized Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, for marrying Herodias, his brother's wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. Luke 3:19 Herod put John in prison, (adding this sin of incarcerating a prophet) to his many others. Luke 3:20 (NLT)

John can wallow in the mud of self-pity...or he can muddle through.

"Herod had sent soldiers to arrest and imprison John as a favor to Herodias. She had been his brother Philip's wife, but Herod had married her. John had been telling Herod, "It is against God's law for you to marry your brother's wife." Mark 6:17-18 (NLT)

John's choice was to "muddle through", to continue on. So how did he do it? how did John keep his faith? Why wasn't it crushed by his difficulties and confusion?

John did three things that kept his faith strong. And I think these three things will help any of us in times of difficulties and confusion. So, what did John do?

1. John voiced out his doubt to Jesus instead of suppressing it.

Matthew writes that ... When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Matthew 11:2 (NIV)

In other words, "John had to ask Jesus, did I get this wrong? Have I gone through all of this for nothing?" It was a difficult question to ask Jesus, but John had to voice out his doubt. It was OK for John to do that then, and it's OK for us to do that today as well.

2. John got the full story of what Jesus was doing.

So, when the disciples of John reported to him about how and what Jesus was doing, They somehow left out some important pieces, which is why John said. Go ask him some more."

... Matthew tells us that ... Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." Matthew 11:2-5 (NIV)

Now, when Jesus said that he wasn't just listing off a series of accomplishments. He was actually quoting the prophet Isaiah's description of what the Messiah would do. He was saying, "John, the same Isaiah who prophesied about you, also prophesied about me. And just like you did what he said, I'm doing what he said."

3. John kept the faith by revisiting the moment where his calling had been confirmed.

Remember when Jesus came to John to be baptized and John resisted?

And Jesus said, "I want you to do it anyway." I don't think that was for Jesus' benefit. I think it was for John's benefit. I think Jesus knew what was going to happen to John.

And I think that's why he allowed himself to be baptized so that John could witness such an important event in the life of Jesus. And not only was a witness, he actually took part of it!