

St John Baptist Day – June 24, 2022

I came across the following story a few months ago on an Ignatian website, written by one of their regular contributors. The story presents itself on a couple of levels. It is a bit light-hearted but put yourself in the scene and listen for the message and the truth in the words.

"I dare you to eat a bug."

Was John the Baptist the kind of kid who might say that? As a mom, I'm curious about such things. When did he acquire a taste for locusts and wild honey?

Let's imagine John as a teen whose parents, aware of the prenatal prophesy, do everything possible to educate him. One day that parental pressure becomes too much.

John is struggling with his call and trying to sort out big decisions. It's one thing to know God's plan; it's something more and altogether different to have the courage to carry it out.

John stomps out of the house, so tired of that old story. Why does he have to hear about Gabriel for the thousandth time? When he was little, he frequently asked, "Tell me how Dad talked to an angel and how I leapt in the womb when Mary visited."

But now something is aching in his gut. After years in an observant home centered on righteousness, he feels pushed to do something. But what? His boyhood, growth, and confusing feelings are part of his hidden life, just like his cousin's.

Now suppose that Mary, who visited Elizabeth before John's birth, returns for many visits with Joseph and Jesus. The boys become good friends. They climb trees and throw rocks and play boyish tricks on each other, doing all kinds of things that normal boys do. Today John isn't aware that his cousin's family has arrived.

"John's outside," Zechariah tells Jesus. "Maybe you can do something to cheer him up."

Jesus sees John sitting on a rock, head bent, throwing pebbles aimlessly at another stone. Still standing near the house, Jesus glances down at a partially filled bucket of water in the hot sun. Grinning, he picks up the pail and tiptoes up behind John. With one swift gesture, Jesus dumps the water on his cousin.

"EEE-yow!" John shouts in surprise. He chases his cousin down to a creek, where John pushes Jesus into the water. Jesus surfaces, sputtering, and they both laugh as they leave the creek and sit down.

"Now don't you feel better?" Jesus asks. After a few moments he prods, "You're worrying about the future."

"Yeah," John replies tentatively. "What does God have in mind for us?"

Jesus sits silent, looking into John's eyes, waiting. Without rushing, John goes on, "The prophecy about me says that I will make the people ready for the Lord. I keep hearing a line: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness,' and I'm not sure why. Do you know it?"

"Yup, I know it," Jesus says. "It's from Isaiah. (40:3-4) 'Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low.' It's about being ready."

"Maybe I'm a little scared," John says quietly. "What does a call to be a prophet feel like? And at what moment does it become clear that it's time to act?"

"I think a day will come when everyone is a prophet," Jesus replies. "When the covenant is fulfilled, all will know when to speak an encouraging word and how to share the truth of God."

John feels consolation pour over him even though the water from his dousing has dried in the sun.

"When the time comes for us to act, John, we'll know it," Jesus says with a brotherly slap on John's back. "Until then, let's go see if supper is ready."

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