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SERMON
JOHN, THE PREACHER
A MESSAGE OF LIBERATION

Mark 1:4-6
Context
Luke 1:5-13

John the Baptist preaches in the desert.

He has no church. He has no pulpit. There is no choir and no organ.

There are no chairs for the people to sit on.

But he preaches with power.

He wears no fancy robes, just a sweatshirt made out of camel's hair.

He eats no fried chicken after service, just a little honey and some grasshopper
(tastes like shrimp).

But he preaches with power.

He drinks no hard liquor and wine has never touched his lips.

And he preaches with power.

His father is a Jewish priest named Zacharias, who works in the synagogue. His mother, Elizabeth, is a cousin of the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So John and Jesus are cousins. John is a member of the holy royal family, a prince of the holy royal blood. He is a Black man.

And he preaches with power.

He received his commission from the angel Gabriel, himself, who came all the way down from heaven with a special message from the most high: "Zacharias, you are going to have a son in your old age."

"And he's going to preach with power."

John preaches publicly for only a year and a half. His public ministry is very brief. But he rouses the entire nation.

Because he preaches with power.

And *all* the people come, from Jerusalem and from all of Judea. Even the king, Herod himself, loves to hear him preach.

Because he preaches with power.

What is his message? This preacher of power? What does he preach?

Repent, he preaches. Repent! Change your life for the better!

They call him John the Baptizer because he baptizes folk in the Jordan river as a sign of the remission or the forgiveness of sins.

John the Baptizer preaches true charity.

He does *not* preach “trickle down” economics.

John preaches: “if you have two coats, give one to the poor. If you have any extra food, give it to the hungry.”

John the Baptizer preaches with power as he announces the good news to the people.

What is this good news he preaches?

Jesus!! Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming! *That* is his message. That is his good news.

He is a special messenger come to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus.

John is a witness to the fact that Jesus is the true light.

His job is to arouse the nation to a state of expectancy.

And he preaches with power.

Now, we know what happened to John. He believed in speaking truth to power and it cost him his head.

He told the king, this same king who liked his preaching, “you’re not supposed to be married to that woman. It’s wrong to take your brother’s wife!”

And the deadly power struggle between rich and poor; powerful versus hungry; claimed his life.

Similarly, John's younger cousin, Jesus, challenged the religious establishment of *his* day.

Jesus spoke truth to the powerful on behalf of the poor.

He repeatedly said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" He stated in his inaugural sermon at Luke 4:18: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor".

Those who tried to help the poor and the powerless and were cut down (lynched) by the rich and the powerful (the powers that be) include: in the last century, John Brown, and in this century: Marcus Garvey; Paul Robeson; Nelson Mandela.

Those cut down in the 1960's include: Medgar Evers (1963); President John F. Kennedy (November 22, 1963), who created the Peace Corps; our Black shining prince, brother Malcolm X (1965); Dr. Martin Luther King (April 4, 1968); Senator Robert F. Kennedy (June 5, 1968); and numerous Black Panthers who were framed for murders they did not commit.

The deadly power struggle between rich and poor continues to this day.

President Bill Clinton wanted to have a doctor for everyone in America. He wanted America to apologize for slavery. He established a national commission on race and had many people of color in his cabinet. For that, he was impeached and nearly removed from office.

We need a John the Baptist today!

America is a great country. But it can be even better!

Why can't our health care system, our educational system, and our legal system be better? So that everyone can be the best that they can be.

A recent study has found that the healthiest people in the world are *not* found in countries of great wealth, such as the U.S.A. or Germany, but in nations with the *smallest* economic gap between the rich and the poor, such as Greece, Japan and Italy.

There are 41 million uninsured in this country today.

The emergency room is their private doctor. The clinic is their health plan.

We need a John the Baptist in our health care system!

My mother was a teacher. My daughter is a teacher. To me, teaching is a sacred profession and teachers are the *heart* of education.

But despite the best efforts of our many dedicated teachers of ability and good will, many of our children are not learning.

Our educational *system* is failing them.

We need a John the Baptist in our educational system!

Crime does pay! For those who build and sell supplies to prisons. Prisons are a booming industry. Fortunes are being made in the jail *business*, on the backs of our Black and white brothers and sisters.

Ninety-four percent of drug prisoners in the state of New York are Black and Latino. What's wrong with this picture?

They have invented crimes, just for us!

DWB = driving while Black

BBB = being born Black - ask Ahmadou Diallo; ask Abner Louima.

If you have a loved-one on the chain gang, strictly for the crime of being born Black and for no other reason: your son, daughter, husband, father, mother, brother, sister, boyfriend, nephew, cousin, or friend — in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who came to preach deliverance to the captives — I declare your loved one “not guilty!”

I declare them innocent!

They are victims! Victims of a system that is designed to keep certain people poor and helpless! So others can be rich and powerful!

God knows, we need a John the Baptist in our criminal justice system!

The real problem is not a shortage of power.

The problem is a *displacement* of power.

There's plenty of power to go around. It's just in the wrong hands! It's in the hands of those rich and powerful who refuse to *share* the power.

Inspiration can come from many sources: From the Bible, from the street or from music.

As the Grammy award-winning hip-hop artist, Lauryn Hill, says, "Why for you to *increase*, I must decrease?"

She says: "Sometimes it seems we'll touch that dream but things come slow or not at all/and the ones on top, won't make it stop/so convinced that they might fall."

Some say: "I'm tired of being Black."

But! Joy comes in the morning! Hard times don't last always!

If you can outlive it, you'll overcome it!

You may have to live through 38 chapters of misery and suffering. But, thank God, the Book of Job has 42 chapters and not 38! His wife told Job: "Curse God, and die." But Job said: "No, I'll *praise* God and live" (Job 42:10).

We know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

We have a secret weapon. We have a secret power supply. We have a power straightener-outer.

The power of Jesus Christ.

The power of the Lord, acting in our lives.

Help is on the way.

I'm a student of history and the Scriptures and I'm here to tell you: deliverance is coming!

My great grandfather was a slave, my grandfather was a sharecropper, my mother started out picking cotton, but that was then and this is now.

You and I are here to collect. We're the collectors. We are here to collect (1) 244 years of back pay from 1615 to 1865 and: (2) 40 acres and one mule for every family, plus interest and penalties for 134 years, from 1865 when the promise was made until today.

This is a spiritual debt. There is no statute of limitations.

Time doesn't count in the spirit realm. Before Abraham was, I am! Before the morning stars sang together or time began to roll—I *am!*

This is a spiritual matter. It's beyond the power of a man. We are on the side of history and the future. The power is coming! Are you ready to collect?

Do you want power in your life?

Then quit whining and start walking!

Get up out of that seat and *stand up*, ready to collect!

The power is coming! The power is coming.

I have my portable power supply right here. It's called a voter registration card. Do you have yours? Wave it around if you have it.

This is America, the beautiful. Everyone has a voice and a vote, no matter how small.

Genesis 15:13, 14: God told Abraham that Abraham's seed would be afflicted in a strange land for 400 years, but that they *would* collect! That they would come out with great power! And they did. When the Hebrews left bondage in Egypt, they took all the gold and

silver of Egypt with them. We've been in this strange land for almost 400 years. 380, to be precise. The 400 years is almost up. The power is coming! Are you ready to collect?

The power is coming!

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