

“John: Best Man”

Isaiah 54:4-10 • John 3:22-36

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 16, 2022

If you’ve ever been to a wedding you probably know that they are kind of a big deal. Not just for the bride and groom, whose lives will be different from then on as the two become one. Just putting on a wedding has become very complex. There are certainly wedding trends that come and go – styles of dresses and tuxes or suits, what kinds of flowers and decorations. But in recent years many couples have decided to have very non-traditional weddings with elaborate themes like Star Wars or Harry Potter. Couples have also held their wedding in unique venues...like Costco and Whole Foods. You can even get married inside the chapel at the flagship Taco Bell in Las Vegas. Let that sink in for a moment. There’s a wedding chapel inside a Taco Bell. And people get married there.

Anyway. There’s one thing that almost all weddings have in common – the bride and groom have attendants, people who agree to help them make the wedding a success. Some have large wedding parties, some have very small ones. But they almost all have at least one person helping. The groom is usually assisted by what we call the Best Man. The Best Man’s job is to help the groom with all of the details, things like making sure the other groomsmen arrive on time and are all dressed and ready to go. His job is to prepare for the bride and groom to succeed.

This is the imagery we find in our passage this morning from John 3. Last week Moses talked about Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish Council who came secretly, under the cover of darkness, to see Jesus. We’re not told exactly why Nicodemus came but we see that he was at least curious about who Jesus is. In response, Jesus says what is probably the most well-known verses of Scripture: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Whatever Nick may have wanted, he left with what he needed. Like you and me, he needed Jesus.

Now John tells us that after this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside and that they were baptizing people there. Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, was also continuing to baptize people, although he moved from the Jordan River to a place called Aenon near Salim where there were several small springs so there was water available. At some point John’s disciples were asked by a Jew about the meaning of their baptism and about the baptisms that Jesus’ disciples were performing. They began to get kind of jealous when they learned that more people were going to see Jesus than John. So they go and ask John about it. They’re kind of saying, “Hey, we’re concerned about our brand. We’re losing market share and you need to do something about it.”

Sadly, this is the way many churches and pastors think today. They look at churches that seem more successful and they are envious. They might criticize the other ministry and its leaders. Or if their church is larger they may try to say that’s a clear sign that God likes them better. John, however, shows us what the correct response should be. He says, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.” In other words, whatever our gifts and talents are, whatever success we have in business or ministry, everything comes from God. In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

John goes on to remind his disciples that he had said, “I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.” He is telling them that his job all along has been to point people to the Messiah. Now that Jesus is on the scene that’s what’s most important. This is where the

wedding image comes in. Throughout the Old Testament, God uses the image of a bride and groom to describe his relationship to his people. In our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 54 God says, "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God."

When I hear that I immediately think of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth's husband had died and she went with her mother-in-law Naomi to Israel where Boaz redeemed her. God tells the nation of Israel that He is their husband, that He will redeem them. All of that, of course, refers to the Church, which is the bride of Christ. So John the Baptist says, "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom." Jesus, therefore is the bridegroom. John goes on, "The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete."

Much like today, in ancient Israel the best man served the groom, helping to get everything ready. The difference is that in those days he had much more responsibility. The "friend of the bridegroom," or best man, was the one who was essentially responsible for putting on the entire wedding. He made most of the arrangements. He served as the liaison between the bride and the groom and their families. He presided at the wedding feast. And most importantly, he protected the bride. The best man's job was to guard the bride's chamber and only allow the bridegroom in. That's why John said that he "rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice." When he heard his friend's voice, when he heard the one he was waiting for, the one he

was preparing the way for, he knew that he had done his job successfully.

What John the Baptist is saying to his disciples is that he is not the bridegroom. He's not the Christ. He's the best man and so when he finally hears Jesus' voice and sees his ministry beginning to be successful, he rejoices. It's not a problem, it's what he was sent to do and now that he's accomplished his task it's time for him to recede into the background. The thing about being the best man is that the job ends when the wedding is over. John says that brings him great joy.

John's job was to prepare people to receive the Messiah. He was to point people to Jesus, which includes helping them to understand who Jesus is. Speaking of himself he says, "He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way." Then of Jesus he says, "He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard." John is saying that he speaks from a human perspective. He points beyond himself to the Christ. But Jesus is different. John says once again that Jesus is God in person. Verse 34 says, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God." When Jesus speaks he speaks on behalf of God, not secondhand like the prophets but with firsthand knowledge. He has come from heaven and so he speaks with authority. As verse 35 says, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand." Jesus said basically the same thing in Matthew 28 when he said, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me."

We can learn a lot from John the Baptist in this passage, especially about humility. John was having a successful ministry. He was attracting large crowds. The temptation would have been very strong to try to continue growing that ministry. But he recognized that God was at work. He knew his role and that Jesus was way more important. He said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." That's the attitude that each one of us should have every day. As you follow Jesus, your goal should be

that He increases in your life and your old sinful self decreases. What does that look like? I think it looks like the fruit of the Spirit exhibited in your life. Would people describe you with words like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control? If you are struggling in one or more of these areas then you must decrease so He can increase.

Finally, John the Baptist was the “friend of the bridegroom,” the best man. He represented the end of the Old Testament era. We, the Church, have the honor of being the bride of Christ. We live in the new era, inaugurated by Jesus. We need to always remember that Jesus died to make his bride, the Church, spotless and holy. There is no greater honor than living holy lives for Him. May it be so.

Amen.