

Sermon Title: *John the Baptist*

- **Introduction**
 - Karl Barth's inspiration from Grunewald's painting
 - John the Baptist's role in pointing towards Christ
- **John the Baptist's Identity**
 - Querying John's identity: Not the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet
 - John's self-identification: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness"
 - Emphasis on pointing away from himself towards Christ
- **John's Selflessness and Reliance on Christ**
 - Negation of self: Acknowledging dependence on Christ for identity
 - Calvin's perspective: John's sole purpose is to prepare for another teacher
 - Baptising to reveal the unknown one
- **Advent and Countercultural Identity**
 - Departure from John's example in modern Advent practices
 - True identity found in witnessing for Christ, not in consumerism or wealth
 - Karl Barth's perspective on John's relationship to Christ
- **Application in Present Times**
 - Inviting the Church to emulate John's pointing gesture
 - Unashamed proclamation of faith in Advent
 - Using John the Baptist as a model to guide lives towards Christ

Discussion Points / Points to Ponder:

- 1. Identity and Self-Abnegation:**
 - How does John the Baptist's self-identification contrast with modern concepts of self-promotion and identity?
 - In what ways can we embrace a more selfless approach to our identities, pointing toward Christ?
- 2. Advent and Countercultural Practices:**
 - How can individuals and churches emphasise Christ rather than materialism during Advent?
- 3. Witnessing and True Identity:**
 - Discuss the idea that our true identity lies in witnessing for Christ. How can this perspective influence our lives and what practical steps can we take?
- 4. Emulating John the Baptist:**
 - In what ways can we emulate John's humility and selflessness in our personal lives and within the Church?
 - How can we balance criticism and encouragement within the Church to continually point towards Christ?
- 5. Relevance of John the Baptist Today:**
 - Why is John the Baptist's example still relevant in today's context of faith and evangelism?
 - Share instances where John's role of pointing towards Christ has impacted your faith or understanding.

Alternative questions:

1. John the Baptist negates his own identity, emphasising himself as "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness." How does this self-negation reflect his purpose? How can we apply this notion of identity in our own lives and service to Christ?
2. John the Baptist's sole purpose was to direct attention to Christ, not himself. How can we emulate this focus in our lives and actions during the Advent season and beyond? What practical steps can we take to point others towards Christ?
3. The sermon discusses the departure of modern Advent practices from the example of John the Baptist. How can we, as believers, redefine our identity away from societal norms (e.g., consumerism, materialism) and align it more closely with John's approach?
4. Karl Barth emphasised that John the Baptist belongs entirely to Christ. How can we cultivate a similar sense of belonging to Christ in our lives and communities? What might this look like practically?
5. John the Baptist exemplified humility and unashamedly proclaimed the truth about Christ. How can humility and bold proclamation coexist in our lives? How might we balance humility with a confident proclamation of our faith?
6. Reflecting on Martin Luther's words, why is John the Baptist's role as a witness and pointer to Christ still vital today? How can we actively listen to this "voice" to ensure we do not miss the significance of Jesus in our lives?