

And the crowds asked John, "What, then, should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

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The crowds ask John the Baptizer, "What should we do?"

Glad you asked!

Pick a value.

One that's transcendent –
one that's grounded in God!

Not one of those modern whims that pass as values, like
"keeping in touch", or "let's get coffee sometime"....

I mean a REAL value,
like compassion or forgiveness
or peace or justice.

Something that's significant
and will be around long after you're gone.

Something moths and rust cannot consume
and thieves cannot break in and steal.

I wouldn't be surprised if the crowds soon realized they'd made a mistake
by asking John what they should do.

They might really like holding onto that second coat and extra loaf
and those old worn out sandals in the back of the closet that your spouse..
The tax collectors have done pretty well with their thumb on the scale!

“Can we afford a cutback in revenue? Besides, everyone does it!”

Soldiers, by definition, push people around.

After all, they don't teach tap or drawing!

If they stopped bullying people, intimidating, threatening,
and pocketing something extra on the side,
who'd submit to them?

Anyway, soldiers have always supplemented themselves this way w/ spoil
John the Baptizer is all about removing obstacles.

When we attempt to change morally –
change a value,

we have to work on the inside to sustain different behavior on the outside.
For this morning...let's take compassion.

What if each one of us would begin the day
clearing our mind from the distractions that always intrude
as we look @ our clocks....

What if each one of us would begin the day with a phrase like,
“Everyone wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer.”

As you slowly and silently repeat this phrase
that makes you equal with everyone else,
pictures of people you know may enter your mind.

Simply use their names in the next phrase,

“Joan wants to be happy & doesn't want to suffer.”

“Frank wants to be happy & doesn't want to suffer.”

And then every so often say,

“I want to be happy and don't want to suffer.”

Now you're in the stew with everyone else!

AND you should read some stuff on compassion.

Over the long haul

it will heighten your awareness of opportunities for compassionate action.

Now, for the really important part!

At the end of the day,

take a moment and review how you lived out the compassion

John/God call us to.

No doubt you'll notice some things that could've been done differently
if you had remembered to value compassion.

Well, get on the phone or email or text and redo that situation!

Don't let embarrassment or your pride stop you – just do it!

Oh, you'll be awkward at first, but you'll get used to it!

This is repenting.

Repentance isn't what bad people have to do.
It's what people who try to live out a value like the compassion of God
find necessary.

Most of us don't get it right the first time!
We only notice what we could've done differently...
like a Monday morning QB or coach.
So we adjust, we meditate, pray, read,
we come to be fed by Christ,
so when we see a more compassionate way we can act on it.
This is how we get better, more integrated.
A little.

John proclaims that Jesus comes to be the Source of God's Holy Spirit.
Jesus connects people to God
so that the Holy Spirit works through the likes of selfish Hoarders,
greedy Tax Collectors,
abusive Soldiers,
and others in the crowds like me and you, so that
others will see our "good works and glorify the Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16
This Holy Spirit will inspire and direct our lives,
providing the commitment to carry out
John's all-encompassing agenda of reform.
The Holy Spirit is the spiritual energy
to share with others and not oppress them.
This is the fire that both purifies every intentional and haphazard effort
and provides the passion to persevere.
This is a fire that burns without burning out,
the fire of the bush that energized Moses in his relentless efforts
to free people from slavery. Exodus 3:2

