



Sermon Growth Guide

DECEMBER 5, 2021

THE FAMILY OF GOD // "THE WILD COUSIN"

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Family of God – The Wild Cousin

Luke 3:1-6

Key Verse: Luke 3:4 “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

Big Idea: God’s family includes all the wild cousins.

Foundations

John the Baptist was Jesus’ wild cousin. Always a little off track compared to the hustle and bustle of city life in Jerusalem, and compared to more rural Bethlehem life, too! Despite what you might think, camel clothes and locusts diets were not all the rage. John danced to a different tune.

But God has purposes for John to pronounce the coming Messiah. Do you ever feel strange and out on the edge, like you don’t quite fit in? You can find your way to Jesus from there. If wild cousin John could find his home in Jesus’ family, so can you.

Or how about this direction: who near you reminds you of wild John? God is reaching out to that brother or sister; are you also? How might your heart become a little more open this Advent to welcome and love all of God’s family?

Consider augmenting your group time this Advent using this year’s Advent devotional, which ties into our series on ***The Family of God***.

Blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to our true and eternal family.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Luke 3:1-6.

With seven historical government seats listed, Luke is abundantly clear about something big happening in verses one and two. What is this monumental event, listed in verse 2b, that Luke anchors so concretely in history?

What is the word that John is called to proclaim in verse three?

Discuss the significance and content of Luke’s cross reference to the prophet Isaiah in verses four through six.

Applying God’s Word

Where do you need to be more welcoming of those you view as “the wild cousins” in God’s family? How can you join the Spirit in your heart being transformed into greater Christlikeness in this vein?

Witnessing God’s Word

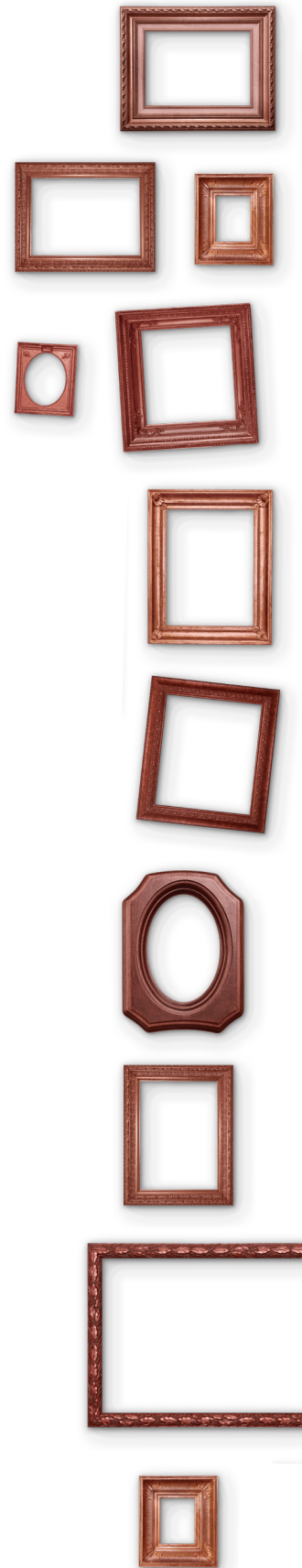
Last week Pastor Jennifer warned us that through this series relationships will be in danger of reconciliation (Praise God!). Thinking of those on the fringes of your relational radar, who can you move toward in relational reconciliation this Advent?

Joseph and Mary were planning to host the family Thanksgiving meal. I know. Come along with me. “Well, is John coming?” asks Joseph. “Yes, Elizabeth says he’s coming.” “Is he wearing that camel-hair thing again? That thing is getting pretty ripe.” “That’s how he prefers to dress, Joseph, let’s try not to make a big deal about it.” “Well, is he going to eat turkey and mashed potatoes with us?” “Elizabeth says he’s on a new diet—locusts.” “Locusts!” “Locusts. He feels great, never looked better. That’s what he eats. Locusts. You’re going to need to run out and get some.” Locusts on the table at Thanksgiving. Just don’t let anybody open the lid. John. **The Wild Cousin.** Every family table has someone that is just a little harder to include than the rest. The wild cousin. The crazy uncle. You know. As the old saying goes, if you don’t know who it is, look in the mirror, it might be you! But the good news is, there is room for John. There is room for the outsider. If there is room for John at the table of the Family of God, there is room for you and me.

It might seem strange to have an Advent or Christmas series sermon on John the Baptist. You don’t think of John in the Christmas scene. He isn’t one of the figurines in your Nativity set. But he is in the story. John and Jesus, distant cousins, are the same age. John shows up in the birth narrative when Elizabeth and Mary meet. They are pregnant with John and Jesus, and they can feel inside how excited these two guys are to be together even before they’re born. So, John can come to Christmas. He belongs here. And I want you to see that for all his eccentricities and differences, God has a place for the wild cousin at the table. Locusts, no locusts, whatever! John can come. But another reason to look at John the

Baptist is that John is a prophet. Our passage will make that clear. It is traditional for the church to take at least one Sunday in Advent to talk about the prophets, how they painted pictures of a coming King, a promised Kingdom, and made the people thirsty and expectant for the coming Messiah. Like a fistful of salt, the more they say the more thirsty we get. The prophets. The way to do that this year is to talk about John the Baptist. Few leaders inspired more Messiah thirst than him. So, let’s start there.

John is a prophet. Luke wants us to know that without question. What’s with all these names of rulers? “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness” (Luke 3:1-2). Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias. In the ancient world, the only way to put a timestamp on something you were worried people might not care about and would forget about was to link it to stuff people did care about and would not forget about—rulers. Luke timestamps this event six times. Six timestamps. Caesar and Pilate, Roman rulers. Herod, Philip and Lysanias, Jewish rulers, monarchs ruling the province of Judea in cooperation with Rome. The high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, religious leadership. Six timestamps. That’s a lot. Why so many? Because something profound happened. “The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” The intertestamental period, the period when no prophets spoke, the 400 years of silence we



heard about last week—it ended. God spoke. God spoke through John.

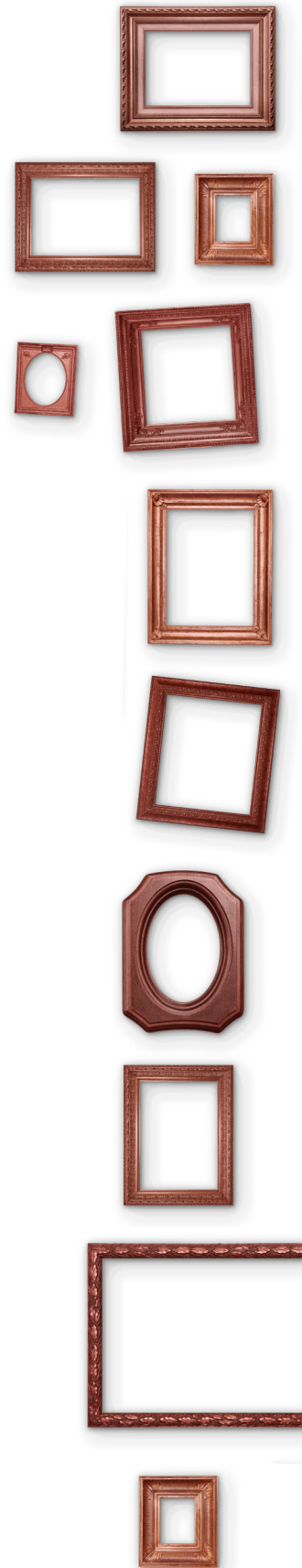
“The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” The wilderness is a wild place—that’s why they call it wilderness. The people of God remember wilderness. That’s where they wandered for 40 years after exile. That’s where unexpected things happen. That’s where some go who don’t fit in much to ordinary life. In the wilderness, God spoke to a pretty wild man. John, the wild cousin. It says the Word of God came to him. Where have you heard that before? Jeremiah 1. Ezekiel 1. Hosea 1. Amos 1. Haggai 1. I could go through all of them. Either the exact phrase, or a vision that follows with “this is what the Lord said it means.” This is prophet talk, plain and clear. The Word came to John. That’s worth the timestamp. When the Word of the Lord comes, everything changes. How about you. Is there a time when you knew the Lord was there, speaking to you? The song on the radio was more than a song, the prayer your friend prayed over you was more than your friend, the Bible came alive in your hands and God spoke to you. Remember it.

The word John received, John delivered. “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). Forgiveness is possible. Your life can change. It’s OK, you can turn around now. Eugene Peterson said, “Forgiveness of sins is what we need, for what is essentially wrong with us is that we’ve turned our backs on God. Until we deal with our relationship with God, we’ll never get anything right. John tells us that we can’t help ourselves but that God will help us. And he will help us by

dealing with first things first: He will forgive us.” Baptism for life change. Internal transformation marked by an external symbol. It’s the life change we need. How many things do we try to fix on the outside? How many things do we strive to add to make things feel a little better? As we all descend into the consumer frenzy of December, what’s on your list? How many things are we trying to add from the outside to improve our lives, and will they work? Ever heard that saying, “Wherever you go, there you are.” Whatever you buy, there you are. What we need is for things to change in here. That’s what John the Baptist was offering, what he believed was on the way: true life change in Jesus Christ.

Then Luke links John the Baptist to the greatest, the chief of all prophets, short of Jesus, Isaiah. “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth’” (Luke 3:4-5). The prophet is a preparer, the prophet is a forerunner, the prophet smooths the way, breaks the trail, straightens the road—not for you to get to God, but for God to get to you! The prophet increases our Messiah thirst, ramps it up, greater and greater intensity until we can’t take it anymore. Then the Lord arrives. “And all people will see God’s salvation” (Luke 3:6). That’s John’s job. That’s his role. Did you ever think, it probably takes a pretty wild guy to do a wild job like that?

John knew his purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. He said so right then as he was baptizing people in the river Jordan, “I baptize



you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). John’s identity is found in his relationship to Jesus. He knows who he is because he knows who he is in relationship with Jesus. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30 ESV). Later in life there would come a moment when he would forget that, or struggle to remember. Arrested, beaten, thrown in prison, his disciples told him what Jesus was up to, but John wondered. “He sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Luke 7:19). Things come along to make us forget; forget who Jesus is, forget who we are. Don’t you know, John? Rotting in prison. Stuck in abuse. John lost himself a bit. Eventually he was yanked from his cell and executed for the sake of a dancing girl’s folly. Things happen to challenge our identity in Christ, to push us to doubt, but John knew. This is who I am. I belong to Jesus. I am in the family of God.

We are not just studying people as we learn about **The Family of God**, we are learning sacred pathways, spiritual avenues. Every individual reveals to us a road to follow to come near to Jesus. I want you to see every person as a road you might walk, or those you know. If John could get to his place at the table of the Family of God, there is hope for you and me. God loves diversity. He made us all just a little different. There is no one exactly like you, and there never will be. You are uniquely fashioned. God loves that. And God loves to love you in a unique way. C. S. Lewis wrote, “Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love

each differently? If all experienced God in the same way and returned Him an identical worship, the song of the Church triumphant would have no symphony, it would be like an orchestra in which all the instruments played the same note.” God loves you and relates to you in a unique way. God loves me and relates to me and draws me into His love in a unique way. Some call these unique ways “spiritual pathways” or “sacred tracks.” Some of us walk an intellectual track, others relational. Some walk the track of serving or activism or worship or quiet contemplation. You may have a track, a love language with God, where you feel His presence most powerfully. We are all a little different. Find your track. I’m not saying there are many ways to God in the sense of many ways to salvation. I’m saying God deals with us as unique individuals to get us to Jesus, the one way, the one truth, the one who brings us into the Family of God.

John was a prophet. John the wild cousin was a different guy. God loves the difference. He loves that personal relationship. While all our paths to Jesus are distinct, Jesus Himself is the one way into the family of God. Jesus was put out of the family to bring us in. Jesus gave up His seat to gain ours. Jesus opens the door and walks us into the Family of God. It is in Jesus, and only Jesus, that “all people will see God’s salvation” (Luke 3:6). Who doesn’t know Christmas is coming? All will see. Some will believe. And all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

