

When you were growing up who was your idol? Mine was Roy Rogers (which means absolutely nothing to many of our younger members.) My brother wanted to be Davey Crockett (and probably still does.) Who are your role models and mentors today?

We live in a world full of people forcing themselves on us and others who hide so no one can expect too much of them. We admire or are inspired by many, and yet we get angry with the disappointments that often come with people we expect so much from.

This is all prelude to what I think John was up to with his blistering tirade down on the River Jordan. John's task was to get people ready to meet Jesus. One would think sweet talk would be the right diet to get people to give Jesus a good look, so John's "fire and brimstone" message is quite surprising.

He wanted them to embrace Jesus but sounded as if he was chasing them away before Jesus could even show up! This seems to be a risky strategy! Standing on the riverbank he accused some of being slithering and selfish people; interested only in saving their own skin and paying no attention to anyone around them!

John was surrounded by people, who for the most part would be called religious and good, or they wouldn't have been there in the first place. They were interested in the Messiah, or they wouldn't have traveled twenty miles from the comforts of home, or taken a day off from work, to stand at the edge of the desert.

He was surrounded by the power brokers of the capital city, priests and Levites, rabbis and Pharisees, lawyers, and merchants. Additionally, there were fathers and mothers, shepherds, and vineyard owners. Young and old. Rich and poor. It was a cast for all seasons and John had wonderfully drawn them in ... *and then he let them have it!*

These were not "bad" people, so why was he so hard on them? They were seekers. They wanted to be in the right place at the right time. They were looking for the perfect role model, someone to follow who would give them everything they wanted and fulfill their hopes and dreams. *They were just like you and me!*

Maybe that (in itself) was a clue to John's choice of a sermon that day! John said, *"If you want to follow God's plan, you need a NEW role model. New goals! You need to keep your eyes open to something you have never seen before. Rather than decide ahead of time what role model should look like, wait and see what God delivers to YOU."*

He said, *"You have no problems coming out and getting clean. You say 'I repent! I want a new life. But I see you going back, repeatedly to the same old things you have always done. You follow the same old role models and live the same old patterns. You show up for a refreshing splash in the river but then live as if you are parched by the heat of the desert. You can recite every passage from scripture by memory but aren't listening to what they say or what God wants you to do."*

John wanted them to make sure they were not trying to find a role model (or Messiah) who would just make them feel good about what they had already decided to be." He wanted them to understand Jesus, is a new kind of role model; different than anyone you they had admired and asking all do things they never thought possible."

And how does our world work? We sample public opinion, take a poll, and then whether undertaken by a politician, movie studio, writer, or just the business next door we lift up what we know our audience already wants to have and to hold.

We decide what a role model should be and then create or elect people who make us feel good about who we already are or would like to pretend we can be. We don't want anyone telling us to change our habits or adjust our needs. And that is exactly what John surmised his audience was tempted to feel as well.

John said, *"You claim to repent. You say, 'sorry!' You pledge allegiance to Messiah, but are you sure that is what you want? As I watch how you live, I am not certain you are serious about why you got your feet wet in this river in the first place!"*

He sounds like the book of James, years later, which said, *"bear fruit worthy of the type of tree you say you are. If you have faith, don't be afraid to show it, because faith, without works, might not be faith at all but only religious words."*

In other words, if you want to follow God's plan, you must follow God's plan. If Jesus is your role model, then the world will see what Jesus looks like to you by what your living proclaims to the world. You are a lifetime church member, which is wonderful, but what does a stranger learn about that faith through the actions of your life?

Baptism gifts us with a relationship but can't keep us close to God against our will. This is more than a ritualistic hedging of bets IN CASE there is a God. Belief in Christ is not a magic wand that automatically saves us if we don't believe what we say.

If you want to see Messiah, it takes more than just standing in the water. You have to watch who he really is. Don't reinvent him. Don't reject him if he isn't what you expected! And don't be surprised when you understand he is NOT like the role models and mentors you have grown up with and have come to expect.

Jesus came to show a new way! To serve instead of being served. To forgive instead of seeking revenge. And he calls us to follow his example. The proof is in the pudding, and the power of baptism is seen in how we live.

Another way to say this is that true worship (meaning to show the WORTH of Christ) is to embrace the relationship given to us as a gift by being a mirror of Jesus in our world. That is what John was meant when he said "don't just wash in the water and pretend we are all in the same boat. Let your living produce fruits of that Spirit.

Looking for a role model in Jesus? I hope so! But do you understand Jesus' goal is that YOU become a role model (in His image) for those around you?

The great surprise is there are people you will touch who will have no better role model than you! That is scary, but worse is to see the role models that the world lifts up

As you begin to wrap your gifts, remember that baptism has wrapped you to reflect the light of Jesus' love. So ... what are YOU waiting for? It is time to quit standing in the water and begin letting that refreshing bath be shared with all whom you touch.

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