

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

How to Please God  
Seventh Sunday after Epiphany  
John 3:22-36

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Take delight in the Lord;  
**For God will give us the desires of our hearts.**

Trust in the Lord;  
**For God will give us security and strength.**

Come, let us commit our ways to the Lord.  
**Let us worship the One who is our refuge in any time of trouble.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

Faithful God,  
You have gathered your people in faithfulness throughout many generations.  
You have offered your blessing to us through their examples,  
and led the Church through many changes and challenges by your Spirit.  
Draw near to us this day to guide us in these uncertain times.  
Root our faithfulness in the compassion and courage we meet in Jesus.  
Renew us through your steadfast love  
so that we may dare to trust our future to you.  
All praise and honour are yours, O God,  
Source, Saviour and Spirit of Life.

**Children's Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

Let us join together in confessing our sins through prayer to our Lord.

**Prayer of Confession**

Gracious God,  
 you test the mind and search the heart,  
 so you know the thoughts and intentions we keep hidden.  
 Trusting in your wisdom and mercy,  
 we confess the ways we have failed to love one another,  
 the times we looked the other way when someone needed help,  
 and the ways our actions betrayed your goodness.  
 Forgive us for missing opportunities to share your love,  
 and carrying grudges that keep us from offering the forgiveness we hope for.  
 Renew us with your mercy  
 to become more merciful to others we meet,  
 in the example of Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

Hear and believe the good news: anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.  
 The old life is gone, and new life has begun. Trust that you are forgiven by God's  
 generous love, and have the courage to forgive one another for Christ's sake.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. Amen.

**Hymn: "Speak, O Lord"**

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You  
 To receive the food of Your Holy Word  
 Take Your truth, plant it deep in us  
 Shape and fashion us in Your likeness  
 That the light of Christ might be seen today  
 In our acts of love and our deeds of faith  
 Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us  
 All Your purposes for Your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience  
 Holy reverence, true humility  
 Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
 In the radiance of Your purity  
 Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
 Your majestic love and authority

Words of pow'r that can never fail  
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds  
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
That will echo down through eternity  
And by grace, we'll stand on Your promises  
And by faith, we'll walk as You walk with us  
Speak, O Lord, 'til Your church is built  
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **Psalms 37 1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Fret not yourself because of evildoers;  
be not envious of wrongdoers!

<sup>2</sup> **For they will soon fade like the grass  
and wither like the green herb.**

<sup>3</sup> Trust in the LORD, and do good;  
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

<sup>4</sup> **Delight yourself in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

<sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him, and he will act.

<sup>6</sup> **He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,  
and your justice as the noonday.**

<sup>7</sup> Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;  
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,  
over the man who carries out evil devices!

<sup>8</sup> **Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!  
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.**

<sup>9</sup> For the evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

<sup>10</sup> **In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;  
though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.**

<sup>11</sup> **But the meek shall inherit the land  
and delight themselves in abundant peace.**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): "I Surrender Lord"**

## Prayer for illumination

### Scripture

#### John 3:22-36

<sup>22</sup> After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized <sup>24</sup> (for John had not yet been put in prison).

<sup>25</sup> Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. <sup>26</sup> And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." <sup>27</sup> John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' <sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. 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.

<sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease."

<sup>31</sup> He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. <sup>33</sup> Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

### Sermon

In the Scripture we are looking at today, Jesus has left the temple after his cleansing and moved to the Judean countryside.

I think we all need to take note of something here, again it is something that is emphasized when we read and study the Scriptures in context.

#### John 3:22

<sup>22</sup> After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

What was Jesus doing while he was in the Judean countryside?

Jesus was baptizing, Jesus who had just cleansed the temple, Jesus who had changed water into wine as a symbol of conversion, who had cleansed the temple as a sign of cleansing and who had spoken to Nicodemus about the need for rebirth and change of character through the spirit and water, was now doing exactly that for those who committed themselves to him.

We see here that Jesus is baptizing in the same manner as John the Baptist, with the same message as John the Baptist, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”

After this as Jesus moves forth in his ministry his message is the same, ‘Repent for the kingdom of God is here.’

For Christians a clear expression of our repentance of our desire to change from the sinners we are into the faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we are baptized. So, it makes sense to see Jesus baptizing here in the region of Judea, alongside John the Baptist who had continued his work of baptizing people even after he had baptized the Messiah himself.

Jesus baptizing others in the very beginning of his ministry, especially following John 3:16, only serves to emphasize the importance of repentance in our walk with God. And the fact that Jesus did it alongside John, serves to show its importance in our public expression of our faith.

What is interesting is what happens as these two men do their ministry alongside one another on the shores of the Jordan river.

### **John 3:25-26**

**<sup>25</sup> Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. <sup>26</sup> And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.”**

It seems that some of John the Baptist’s disciples got into a debate with some of the local Jewish leaders. We are not given the details of the dispute, however we learn that they are very concerned, because Jesus is across the river from John baptizing, and it seems that everyone is going to Jesus for their baptism instead of coming to John.

This was their concern, that Jesus was doing better than them.

### **John 3:27-30**

**<sup>27</sup> John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ <sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. 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. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.”**

When his disciples come to him in their concern, John responds with grace and understanding. John explains to them why the fact that Jesus’s ministry seems to be doing so much better than his is not a concern to him.

John is speaking very clearly; however, it is in a very Hebraic manner.

He begins by saying that a man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven.

Johns' primary response to his disciples is stop worrying, everything that I have in my life, everything I have in my ministry is not of my doing, it is a gift from God above. So, if Jesus of Nazareth is drawing larger crowds in his ministry of baptism, then that is God's gift as well. Essentially, John is telling them to stop worrying, God is in control.

What a great reminder to his disciples, and what a great reminder to us, God is always in control. What a great reminder that we should be ready and willing to receive the tasks that God gives us to do in this life with a sense of humility and do them to the best of our ability, because they are a gift from God himself.

This is a great reminder for those of us who are called to do the work of sharing the Gospel. Whether we see a great success or not, we should be doing that task to the best of our ability. Whether we have 100 people, 10 people or even a single person come to hear the Word of God we need to continue on sharing the message of the Gospel.

So, when you go out and try to share the Lord with others do not be discouraged, if even one person who listens to you it is a gift from God. Do not be discouraged, be invigorated, that God has chosen to put you to use for his purpose.

That is what John the Baptist was teaching his disciples, whatever your ministry is, whether its hundreds of people or a single person it is a Gift from God, so do it to the best of your ability to glorify his name.

John then tells them, **'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'** John reminds his disciples that he knows his position in the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus is the Messiah, and I am his servant, I know my place in God's plan.

John is reminding his disciples and all of us that we all have a place to serve in God's plan.

There is this weird concept in Christianity that often comes up in denominations and churches. It says that if you really want to serve and please God you should be a Pastor, or a Missionary, or an Elder, or a Bible study teacher, or a Sunday School teacher.

This is not true at all, If you really want to serve and please God find out what call he has given you. Do what God wants you to do, maybe God just wants you to be a hard worker, who loves his family, supports his church and prays for his community and serves God in whatever ways he calls you in the community and the church.

If you do that you will hear, 'Well done good and faithful servant.', on the Day of Judgement.

If you really want to please God, be converted, changed and committed to him, then find your place in his plan, discover the things he has not called you to do, so you can find the things you are called to do, and serve him humbly and faithfully.

John knew what he was not called to be and what he was called to be, and he was fully committed to the task for which God had called him.

John then reminds his disciples that he is the 'friend of the bridegroom.' He is the Best man at the wedding. He is speaking plainly, saying I am not supposed to be the focal point of this ministry. The best man should not outshine the groom at the wedding.

The job of John is to be the best man at the wedding, and that makes Jesus the groom. And once again this points to Jesus Christ as divine. Throughout the entire Old Testament God is the Husband of the nation of Israel. So, when John the Baptist makes this reference to himself as the best man and Jesus as the groom, he is saying Jesus is God to his disciples.

This is the message that the Gospel of John repeats over and over, Jesus is God. Jesus is God.

So, John is happy that Jesus is getting more attention in his ministry, it is how it should be, the groom should be drawing more attention than the best man.

John lost his congregation to Jesus, and he was happy about it, because he humbly accepted his role in God's kingdom and God's plan.

Finally, John states, **'He must increase, but I must decrease.'**

I need to get smaller; I need to be less important in my life and he needs to get more focus.

There needs to be less of me and more of Jesus.

This should be the motto of every church, every denomination and every servant of the Lord.

There needs to be less of me and more of Jesus.

This should be the focus of our public ministry as a church and as individuals, Jesus first, our church second. If someone chooses to follow Jesus, truly be converted, changed and committed to Christ because of the work we do, and then they choose to go to a different church we should celebrate that. Jesus first, that is our primary goal to build the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

John the Baptist was not concerned about the shrinking of his ministry, because it was for the purpose of God. He knew his ministry was a gift of God and he knew that God would continue to use him as he intended to serve his kingdom.

As long as people are leading people to Jesus, as long as people are sharing the Gospel truthfully, they are our partners in this world, and we need to celebrate with them and help them in any way in which we can to build God's kingdom.

When you understand what John means by, '**He must increase, but I must decrease.**' Then you will begin to truly serve the Lord your God and do his bidding here on Earth.

John did not give up when Jesus's ministry outgrew his, when people left to go follow Jesus directly. He kept doing what God called him to do to the best of his ability, serving God in the way he had been called.

John the Baptist, served the way he was called and even as his ministry shrunk his influence was maintained. God used John the Baptist for his plan and more than 20 years after this event in a city almost 2000 km away, there were disciples of John the Baptist baptizing people and telling them to 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.'

John put his focus on God and left everything in God's hands. He became less so Jesus could become more, and his fame and influence came from the Lord, evidence of his faith and the glorification of God through his life.

'He must increase, but I must decrease.' Let me tell you who he is and why He must increase, and I must decrease

### **John 3:31-36**

<sup>31</sup> He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. <sup>33</sup> Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Jesus came from heaven, he is above all, and we must listen to him. That is why it is fine by me if I decrease so that he increases, he is God.

Notice that in verse 32, John tells us that people will reject his testimony. He is speaking with some hyperbole here, there were some who accepted his testimony, it is estimated that when Jesus ascended into heaven after his death and resurrection, he had roughly 120 disciples.

Thousands upon thousands had heard him preach, seen his miracles and been in his presence, yet they had not been converted, changed and committed, that group was only roughly 120 people.



Even though John the Baptist attested to the fact that Jesus was God, even though people witnessed the Trinity at his baptism, even though people saw people healed, demons cast out, raise from the dead, and Christ himself was resurrected, people still only believed in Jesus Christ in name, they were not willing to convert, change and be committed to him as their Lord and Saviour.

So, John once again speaks plainly. He starts with a beautiful message; Jesus speaks the Word of God. Jesus is God and he walks among us, he is fully God, and his Word is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one we should all be following, 'He must increase, so I can decrease'

So, he who believes in the Son has everlasting life. Jesus is God and man, and he is different, you need to be converted, changed and committed to him. You need to let the Holy Spirit cleanse the sin from your life, even the sin you love so much, so that you can have eternal life in his presence.

Because for those who do not, there is something else.

**'whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.'**

John reminds us that because Jesus is God, he was sent from Heaven to die on our behalf and if you reject that free gift of God, to pursue your own worldly pleasures, then you miss out on eternal life and instead pay the heavy price of rejecting him, the wrath of God.

A Bible commentator by the name of Merrill Tenny said this about God's wrath.

**'the word does not mean a sudden gust of passion or a burst of temper rather it is the settled displeasure of God against sin it is the divine allergy to moral evil the reaction of righteousness to unrighteousness'**

You cannot tell Jesus that 'I want the gift of eternal life, but I reject you. I reject your authority in my life'. Eternal life and submission of self to Jesus Christ come together. The Scripture and the teachings within it are not a choose your own adventure book, you accept it all in your life, or the free gift of Eternal Life is not something to which you can lay claim.

John chapter three reminds us that we must be born again, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that He must increase in our life and that we must decrease.

That we need to be converted, changed and committed to our Lord and Saviour as we walk as the Salt and Light of his Word in this fallen world.

Let us Pray,

**For Others**

I offer up to you my prayers and intercessions,  
 for those especially who have in any matter hurt,  
 grieved, or found fault with me,  
 or who have done me any damage or displeasure.  
 For all those also whom, at any time,  
 I may have vexed, troubled, burdened, and scandalized,  
 by words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance;  
 that you would grant us all equally pardon,  
 for our offences against each other.  
 Take away from our hearts, O Lord,  
 all suspiciousness, indignation, wrath, and contention,  
 and whatsoever may hurt charity, and lessen brotherly love.  
 Have mercy, O Lord,  
 have mercy on those who crave your mercy,  
 give grace to those who stand in need thereof,  
 and make us grow to enjoy your grace,  
 and go forward to life eternal.  
 In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

*Source: Thomas à Kempis*

**Hymn: "On Eagles Wings"**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord  
 Who abide in His shadow for life  
 Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"

**Chorus**

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings  
 Bear you on the breath of dawn  
 Make you to shine like the sun  
 And hold you in the palm of His hand

The snare of the fowler will never capture you  
 And famine will bring you no fear  
 Under His wings your refuge, His faithfulness your shield. (Chorus)

For to His angels, He's given a command  
 To guard you in all of your ways  
 Upon their hands they will bear you up  
 Lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Chorus)

## **Invitation to Offering**

### **Offering**

### **Offertory Prayer**

### **Closing Hymn: "10,000 Reasons"**

Chorus

Bless the Lord oh my soul

Oh my soul

Worship His Holy name

Sing like never before

Oh my soul

I'll worship Your Holy name.

The sun comes up

It's a new day dawning

It's time to sing Your song again

Whatever may pass

And whatever lies before me

Let me be singing

When the evening comes.

(Chorus)

You're rich in love

And You're slow to anger

Your name is great

And Your heart is kind

For all Your goodness

I will keep on singing

Ten thousand reasons

For my heart to find.

(Chorus)

And on that day

When my strength is failing

The end draws near

And my time has come

Still my soul will

Sing Your praise unending

Ten thousand years

And then forevermore

Forever more.

### Pastoral Prayer

God of all life and each life:

You created us and set us in relationship with each other  
in families and neighbourhoods,  
in communities and countries,  
in cultures and nations.

Today we give you thanks for all the gifts of home life and community  
Thank you for the blessings we know  
through the contributions of those who have gone before us.  
Help us offer what we can  
to sustain the wellbeing of our community and country.

God of our faith and our future,  
there are so many pressures we face today,  
so many problems without simple solutions.  
Draw near to anyone who is struggling in economic difficulty,  
and all those burdened by challenges to their health and happiness  
and support all those who are finding the stress of life overwhelming.  
Ease any conflict in homes and workplaces  
and inspire solutions that express  
Help us share with others the hope we find in your presence.

God of mercy and forgiveness,  
You call us to live together in peace and unity.  
We pray for our neighbourhoods and the nations of this world.  
Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment,  
show us how to work for reconciliation.  
Where violence and fear turn neighbour against neighbour, or nation against nation.  
equip leaders to work for justice that will bring peace.  
Help us build a world where children enjoy a future  
filled with your presence and good health and happiness.

God, our hope and our help,  
send your Spirit to equip our congregation with skill and resilience  
to weather the challenges of our life of service in this world  
Strengthen friendships, new and old,  
and make us a source of encouragement and connection to each other.  
Help each one find a place and a purpose in our mission and ministry  
for it is as your children that we pray together in Jesus's name. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the grace of God,  
freely given through Christ, our Lord,  
and sufficient for all our needs,  
and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
who testifies with our spirit  
that we are God's children,  
guide and sustain us this day  
and forever. **Amen.**