

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“Our Client, John”

John 12: 17-46

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I spent a number of years studying to be a therapist and learned a lot of good and useful things.

I learned how to say, **“What I hear you saying is....”**

And how to say, **“So... how do you feel about that?”**

And, **“What does your silence mean?”**

And the most useful of all... **“Hmmmmm”**

Seriously, the training I received to become a therapist is helpful to me most everyday. Especially when I'm in a one on one moment. There are some things I learned and put in to practice all the time.

For instance, you can't really understand someone until you know their language. Seems obvious... and maybe seems easy if we both speak English... but it's not. Everyone has words and words that mean particular things... Words that carry a lifetime of meaning, and a meaning that is unique to that person.

You know how this is... Everyone just has their way of talking and saying things. If you go over to Katy Stokes house for tea, I can promise you, she'll use the word **“dear”** at least once.

And if you come to choir, Kurt is going to use the word, **“kindly,”** he just will.

And if you see Paul Carron he'd say **“Sup dude????”**

And **“Sweet!!!!”**

If you sat down with Ralph Wood for lunch, he'd use a word like **“punctilliar”** that you'd have to look up when you got home.

My mom would say, **“I swanny.”**

Doyle would say something about **“the nous.”**

Susan Josephs would hit you and say, **“Get out!”**

That's just the way it is with all of us and as you get to know a person, you get to know their vocabulary and what they mean and when that happens you have a chance of understanding them.

You also have to know their story... and you have to be able to picture their world. What's it like teach an inner city third grade class everyday? Can you picture that?

What was it like to grow up with everyone expecting so much of you?

Or maybe nothing of you?

What's going on when someone goes through a divorce?

Can you picture what this person has known?

In your mind... can you picture abuse?

And what this person you're relating to has endured?

Because if you're trying to understand someone who's been abused and you can't imagine what life was like for them and how that's shaped them, then you won't get what they're saying to you.

And, by the way, I just don't want any of us to ever forget that when we gather and we sing our hymns and we say our prayers... I don't want any of us to forget that there are stories all around us of folks who have endured all of that and then some... Remember that.

You've got to know the story... what life was and is like. Got to know the language... their words and metaphors... clichés...

And, you've got to have a sense of just who they are... their personality type. They just came out of the womb a certain way and if you really can't get that you can't get what they're saying. You're likely to misinterpret.

So... now that I've taught you "Counseling 101", lets all invite John the Apostle into the office and onto the couch and try to listen to him and understand him. The tech's are not just helpful for pastoral care but also for Biblical interpretation. So, let's listen to John. He's telling us something. He's had a certain experience... he has a certain personality... and language.

There are certain words he likes to use and you'll notice that right off the bat.

He uses the word hour a lot. Almost every time he comes in to see you.

"I appreciate you seeing me, counselor...there's a lot going on. It just seems to be my hour."

"Well, yes John, this is your hour... 11:00... we booked it last week."

"Uh... no... I mean it's like my hour has arrived."

"Yes, it has. 11:00 comes around everyday."

"No counselor, I mean it's my time. Like this is a season that has arrived where I'm supposed to be working with you in therapy... don't you understand?"

"Well... not completely, John, but I'll work on it."

You'd also hear him say glory. And you probably would have trouble with that word too.

"Counselor... is this a picture of your wife."

"Why, yes it is."

"The photographer really revealed her glory."

"Uh... um... what?"

"Well, it's like I'm really seeing her... the essence of who she is... what she's all about. It's almost like I know her... like she's present here in this picture... you know... glorified."

"Well, John, I don't know completely what you mean but I'll work on it."

Then on another day, you'd notice him using the word believe. He might say, **"You know counselor, I really believe in you."**

"Well, good John, I'm glad you believe in me when I say I'm a competent therapist. I do have graduate degrees from two different institutions and I'm licensed and certified... and I'm glad you believed me when I told you these things about me."

"No, you don't understand. I believe in you. I've shared so many things with you... really opened up... trusted you with my very self. I believe and I believe in you. Understand?"

"Well, John, not yet... not completely ... but I'll work on it."

One day he'd probably say something like. **"You know, when it gets quiet in our sessions. It seems like eternity."**

"Yeah," you'd say, "Silence is hard and it can seem like forever."

"No counselor... I mean... when it gets quiet... I can sense eternity. You know, the eternal, the vertical dimension... the spiritual kingdom... you know."

"Um... no, not completely, John ... but I'll work on it."

And you'd notice him talking about "the world" and "light" and "darkness" and "seeing" and "sign" "sent" and "Son of Man" ... and after a while of working on it... you'd start to know what he meant... because he means a certain thing and you can't assume you know that just because you know the word.

Getting someone's language is important... if you're going to understand them. And imagining a story... that's critical too. ... The circumstances... what someone has been through and what life's been like.

As you got to know, our client John, he'd tell you stories. And you have to imagine his journey to understand his stories.

What it was like to meet Jesus... and to be close to him. He just always wanted to be right there with him as near as possible. **“Man... the closer I was, the more eternal it was... you know... vertical.”**

And, of course, you'd hear about what it was like to watch Jesus being raised up on a cross. And to look into an empty tomb and hope he'd been raised up from that.

And to see him raised up beyond this world.

Those would be great stories to hear... the best of all.

A lot of what you'd talk about would be what it was like to deal with the church and his family and the world, really that was theme of his life... in the aftermath of Jesus. Here he was, the recipient of this amazing story and there were so many in the Jewish faith... just so mad at him, they wanted to kill him.

And the Romans... they were suspicious.

And the Greeks... were skeptical.

And his Christian friends... were often afraid.

And he'd learned along the way that not everyone seemed to be able to see what he could see... about Jesus... or hear what he'd heard from God. You'd hear stories, in the counselor office, of his own frustration with them.

And with those who seem to believe but didn't believe the way he did. And the calling he felt to proclaim what he knew to be true... and to bear the burden of the truth.

It'd take some time but after a few sessions, you'd begin to pick up on what it was like to be John and the stories he told of Jesus and how he told them??? You would come to realize that their was the story of John behind the story of Jesus.

And not just the story of John but also the person of John... who he... just... was. John always seemed to be looking past things... beyond them... through them.

Nothing was just an event... there was something larger behind it. John, you imagine, when he was little would look at a crooked stick and say, **“But why is it crooked and what does it mean that it is not straight. But why does the caterpillar become a butterfly... what does it mean?”** That's just the way John was...

So... after some weeks of getting to know this navel gazer... and having learned his vocabulary and having heard his stories... you'd be in a better place to understand John when he told you the story we heard in Chapter Twelve of his gospel today.

You'd sit up when he said, **“the whole world was going after him.”** Because you know that word *cosmos* is a big deal to him. And you'd understand that he really means... *“The whole world” the cosmos... everyone and everything... not just the insiders. Not just the Jews. Jesus has come that the world might be saved... everyone and everything.*

And you would continue to track with that thinking when John said to you, **“Counselor on that day, some Greeks came asking to see Jesus.”**

And you're thinking... *Greeks? Well of course, they're there because the Gospel John has proclaimed goes beyond the bounds of Judaism, it's for the Gentiles too.*

And maybe you'll also remember some stories John's told you about dealing with Greeks through the years and so you're thinking... *the Greeks could get so stuck in their heads and in their philosophies. Sometimes they even laughed at the notion that God would take on a body...and die for someone.*

So, you're hearing John say something more than, **“Hey some Greeks showed up.”** You suspect he's talking about more than just a hand full of people... it's all the Greeks and you know this is true as you hear that they went first to Philip and Andrew who were from Galilee and had Greek names. You're just listening beneath the words...being a good therapist.

And the strangest thing happens as John tells it. Andrew and Philip take these folk to Jesus... **“Jesus there are some Greeks here to see you.”**

And it's so odd the way John tells it but your used to that and you know the disconnect means something. John is trying to tell you something important. **“Jesus there are some Greeks that want to see you.”** Jesus replies to that... **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be Glorified.”** Man-there it is again...that disconnect. People in John's story say something and he says something disconnected. “Hey Jesus there are some Greeks here.” Jesus replies, “And so is my hour.”

“His hour?” There it is again... and before when you'd listen to John it was always... **“Not now... not yet... my hour has not yet come.”** But now it has... It's time... it's his “hour.” The moment he was made for. His destiny.

And you notice, he returns to the word. **“My soul is troubled by what should I say, ‘Save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour, ‘Father, glorify your name!’”**

And there's the other big word. **“Glorify.”** And as John tells you the story, you're remembering that he means by that “make known... make known your name... your essence.” So the wheels are really spinning as John keeps telling you about that particular day...

The hour is here...

this is why Jesus came...

there's no resistance...

no 'let this cup pass from me.'

And you notice that.

John has a certain way he wants you to see Jesus and Jesus is not being pushed along by political forces. He's laying down his life; it's not being taken from him. It's all coming together here in this story. Where a seed must fall to the ground and die to bear fruit. That's it purpose.

Jesus, the seed, containing all the reality of the divine, will be manifesting that reality. Inside a seed is the code to life that is opened and activated as it falls. Jesus falls and the reality inside is made known. God is glorified... revealed and the whole world is invited to believe in Him.

And as you listen to the next part of the story... you're remembering John's work and ministry... and how hard it was for folks to see and to get it. They all came to Jesus with minds so set. The Greeks with their philosophies.

The Jews with their expectations of the Messiah.

Everyone with darkened hearts...

Stunted souls.

It's no wonder after this story, John quotes for you Isaiah where he talks about who has believed... or not... And about how their eyes have been blinded and their hearts hardened ...

You almost can't believe it when John starts telling you about this amazing moment where God spoke in an audible voice but no one heard it.

Some folks heard something spiritual... like the angels were singing and others just thought it was thundering. And you know John is saying to you. **“Counselor, that's just the way it is... It's been that way all my life. I've been preaching and prophesying and teaching and telling and this is what it's like.”**

And you understand... you get him. Some of us... only hear thunder... only hear the temporal... are deaf to what God is saying in Christ. Some hear???? Something spiritual... angelic... but they don't understand the full significance. It's just, **“Oh, Jesus sure seems... nice... smart...etc.”**

It was just astounding to John and is to you... This is the Story of all stories... the Story of everyone's story. John has looked through Jesus and he sees the Word has been made flesh... Two realms intersecting in Jesus... Flesh and Spirit.

Here it all is in Jesus,
 come to make God known...
 to glorify God.

Everything has pointed to this... so that when John sees Jesus he sees who God is... And when he hears Jesus he hears the voice of God. And as he watches Jesus lifted up... in death and in life and into eternity... Jesus is glorifying... making known... the Father and the Father is making known the son... they reveal one another.

It's love so amazing... so Divine... God speaks, out loud in Christ. And all some hear is the thunder or maybe a few angels singing at best. John surely would sit quietly and you would too after client finished a story like that.

And he'd finally tell us maybe with a lump in his throat that shortly after this event Jesus cries out... John cries as Jesus did... **"Those who believe in me also believe in the one who sent me. When they look at me they see the one who sent me."** They get it. That's the whole point... that's why he came.

Then, perhaps, John would look at the clock in our office... and knowing the hour was drawing near, would take a deep breath say, **"After this he hid himself from them."** This was his last public act. Then, he hid himself from those who couldn't get it... who wouldn't go deep enough and know the "inside story." He hid himself after that.

... Just him and the disciples...
 him and himself.

Just himself and God.

And John says as he stands to leave, **"Looking back on it now... it's hard to tell where anything started and stopped... God... Jesus... us..."** And it was like John had drifted off, staring out the window of our office... It was like we weren't there as he softly spoke the words of Jesus... **"Just like you are in me and I am in you... may they be in us."**

John caught himself... **"Sorry.... Yeah"** he says, putting on his cloak"... **"he hid himself from them"... but it was like he had hid himself in us that the world might know that he was sent from God. Know what I mean?"**

"Well, John,... not completely... but we'll work on it."