**Sunday 11th July 2021 –   
Service at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC & Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership**

Welcome to our today’s service. My name is Andy Platt and I am a lay preacher at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC.

Today we are looking at one of my favourite characters in the New Testament – John the Baptist – His feast day is my birthday, June the 24th. My favourite description of him is “the voice in the wilderness crying repent”. How often do you feel like that? – the person on their own shouting out – and often being ignored Today we are surrounded by people telling us what to do – by social media spreading “fake news” – so who do you listen to? – who is guiding you? And us? – are we telling God’s message to the people around us?

**Let us pray**

Call to worship

As we come together today,

let us be mindful of our words

and the impact they have on those around us.

Let us seek God’s wisdom and love

to guide us in all that we seek to say and do,

today and in days to come

Amen.

Clip from Godspell – Prepare Ye The Way of The Lord

**Family Time:**

Who do you listen to? Who tells you what to do? Is it:

Friends

Parents

Teachers

Play Simon Says

Every day we have people telling us what to think, what to do, how to act. So, if someone tells you to do something you are not sure about. If they are telling you to hurt someone or do something naughty. If you aren’t sure or if you are in doubt, ask yourself “what would Jesus do”?

**Let us say together the prayer you taught us**

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 trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. AMEN

**Prayer for children before they leave during the next hymn.**

**Our hymn is: Tell Out My Soul (MP 631) (Children Leave)**

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| 1.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice; tender to me the promise of His word; in God my Saviour  shall my heart rejoice. | 2.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name! Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done, His mercy sure, from age to age the same; His holy name-the Lord,  the mighty One. |
| 3.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!  Powers and dominions lay their glory by Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight, the hungry fed, the humble lifted high. | 4.. Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word! Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord to children's children and forever more! |
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**Bible Readings**

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**Mark 6:14-19**

**John the Baptist beheaded**

14King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206%3A14-29&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-24422a)] ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’

15Others said, ‘He is Elijah.’

And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.’

16But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’

17For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. 18For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ 19So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206%3A14-29&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-24428b)]; yet he liked to listen to him.

21Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22When the daughter of[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206%3A14-29&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-24430c)] Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.’ 23And he promised her with an oath, ‘Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.’

24She went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’

‘The head of John the Baptist,’ she answered.

25At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: ‘I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a dish.’

26The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28and brought back his head on a dish. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

**Talk 1 - Speaking**

So here we have John the Baptist – a Jewish prophet, who preached about the coming judgement of God and baptised people in the River Jordan as a preparation. He is described in the gospels and other histories of the time – Josephus’s “The Antiquities of the Jews”.

In the gospels we are told that John is Jesus’s cousin and their conceptions and births are very similar – with angels announcing their arrivals.

Interestingly other religions also recognise John. Islam recognises John and tell a similar story about his birth and life. In fact I think I am right in saying he is one of the 25 prophets of Islam.

John was not afraid to tell the truth – he upset Herod by criticising him for marrying his brother’s (or actually half-brother’s) sister – which was illegal in Jewish law. Now, as we know, criticising Kings is never a good thing to do and so John had been dumped in jail. Herod was not inclined to punish John, but Herod’s wife was really annoyed with him. She got her daughter to dance for him. Herod was very impressed with the dance and offered her anything as a gift. She asked for the head of John the Baptist, which Herod didn’t want to do but he had to honour his promise.

And just to ensure no-one is confused – this Herod isn’t the Herod who was trying to kill Jesus at Christmas.

Therefore, I suppose the question here is: are we a John the Baptist – proclaiming the coming of the Lord, denouncing evil, with no fear of the consequences. Or do we see things that are wrong, things that we think are evil and are too worried about the consequences of speaking out that we keep quiet.

And if we do speak out then the difficulty we have is are we speaking out against things that are truly evil or are we just voicing our own views and prejudices. How do we know that we are truly passing on God’s word or just our own thoughts? How many so-called preachers do we see on youtube or other places who are spreading words of bigotry and evil in the name of Jesus? This is the scary part about being a preacher. Checking and rechecking what you are saying to ensure it is really supported by scripture, that we are not letting ourselves get in the way of God’s message.

I suppose that the simplest way is to check your words against what Jesus said and did. Do our words reflect the two great commandments of Love God and Love your neighbour. Do our words demonstrate the love of god and the love of our neighbours? If your words are words of love then you are probably going in the right direction. As it said in the Ephesians reading:

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,”

**Let us pray**

Praise God for those whose faith is strong;

for those who stand up for what they believe in;

for those who try to say what is right;

for those who resist pressure from their friends

when it goes against your best plans for our lives.

Help us to be brave and to speak your word

**Amen.**

**Our next Hymn is: Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace (MP456)**

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| 1.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  Where there is hatred  let me bring Your love;  where there is injury,  Your pardon, Lord;  and where there's doubt  true faith in You. | Chorus: *O Master, grant that I may never seek,*  *so much to be consoled as to console;*  *to be understood as to understand;*  *to be loved as to love with all my soul.* |
| 2.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  Where there's despair in life  let me bring hope;  where there is darkness, only light;  and where there's sadness, ever joy. | Chorus: *O Master, grant that I may never seek,*  *so much to be consoled as to console;*  *to be understood as to understand;*  *to be loved as to love with all my soul.* |
| 3.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  in giving to all men that we receive;  and in dying that we're born to eternal life. | George Matheson  ©1967 OCP Publications  Ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 |

**Talk 2 - Hearing**

Communication is two-way. Someone communicates and someone listens. Both need to make sure that the communication works effectively.

Herod is easily swayed – he listens to John – but doesn’t like what he says

He listens to the crowd and is scared of the crowd’s opinion

He is persuaded and manipulated by his wife

Not exactly a shining example of a strong leader. Imagine such a powerful person who continually changes his mind, has no moral backbone, who is always looking to please the crowd. Good job our political leaders today aren’t like that.

Who do you listen to, are you swayed by the crowd’s view, who can manipulate you?

10 years ago we hadn’t probably heard of fake news – it wasn’t a common term. Now fake news is prevalent. Question for you – where do you get your news from? Newspapers, the BBC, the radio. According to surveys, nearly two-thirds of people get their news from social media sites. For those people who are Facebook users the number goes to over two-thirds. Think of the implications of that. Most people get their news from places that aren’t set up to gather, verify or manage news content. Recently places like Facebook have had to start putting proper controls in place, because of the number of organisations and people who were exploiting social media sites to spread lies and false information.

Why do people publish fake news? Maybe because they believe it, but more often as a form of politics or warfare. A number of governments will publish fake news to destabilise countries they see as their competitors; for example to get an unstable politician into power in another country – to influence the outcome of elections or referendum to get results that are damaging to that country. Foreign governments are considered to have used fake news to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and to promote brexit.

And it’s not just about publishing lies and false facts. These systems are clever. When you log onto sites, they deploy code on to your laptop or phone to watch what you click on, to monitor what you type. These systems can analyse what you do to profile you. They capture your interests and preferences and then they target you with specific fake articles tailored to appeal to you. Every time you go onto these social media sites, you are being profiled and analysed and then they use that to manipulate you.

Now Herod was easily manipulated. You could say he was played. So how do we as Christians ensure we are not manipulated, or pushed into believing stuff which isn’t true?

At a practical level there are a set of simple things you can do.



The other element to focus on, whenever we are hearing or seeing a message, is to ask ourselves “does what we are hearing align to what Jesus would say or do – does the message reflect Jesus’s message of love God and love your neighbour.”

**Hymn – Jesus is Lord (MP367)**

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| 1.. Jesus is Lord!  Creation's voice proclaims it,  for by His power each tree and flower  was planned and made.  Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;  sun, moon and stars in heaven cry:  'Jesus is Lord!' | 2.. Jesus is Lord!  Yet from His throne eternal  in flesh He came to die in pain  on Calvary's tree.  Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,  yet gave His life a ransom  thus setting us free. |
| 3.. Jesus is Lord!  O'er sin the mighty conqueror,  from death He rose and all His foes  shall own His name.  Jesus is Lord!  God sends His Holy Spirit  to show by works of power  that Jesus is Lord! | Chorus: *Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!*  *Praise Him with hallelujahs,*  *for Jesus is Lord!* |
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**Let us confess before God – Let us pray**

God of truth, forgive us

when we have not used our words to influence for good,

but for our own purposes;

when our words have hurt and excluded others;

when we have allowed our own wants, fear and pride

to get in the way of telling your truth

when we have seen injustice, evil and wrong and we have kept quiet

God, forgive us.

Lord when we have listened to the words from those who advocate evil and greed,

when we have listened to those who exploit our fears and prejudices

when we have been persuaded by the crowd,

when we have wanted to join in with others so we will be popular

God forgive us.

Let our thoughts, our words and our actions

glorify you and reveal your presence and purposes.

Let our words and message be your words and message.

Help us to think at all times – what would Jesus say and do.

Amen.

**Let us lay before God our needs**

Dear Lord

Hear our words

Help us to speak out about what is wrong in the world

To speak for the hungry

To speak for homeless

To speak for the oppressed

To speak for the sick

To speak for the deprived

Help us to speak words that will be listened to by those with the power to do something

Understanding that the person with the power may be us

Help us to hear; to hear the hungry, homeless, oppressed, sick and deprived

To hear those without an effective voice.

And at this time we think particularly of those in our congregation

Lord – help us to hear and speak as your servant

Amen

**Hymn: Give Me Oil In My Lamp (MP167)**

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| 1.. Give me oil in my lamp,  keep me burning,  give me oil in my lamp, I pray;  give me oil in my lamp,  keep me burning,  keep me burning till the break of day. | 2.. Make me a fisher of men,  keep me seeking,  make me a fisher of men, I pray;  make me a fisher of men,  keep me seeking,  keep me seeking till the break of day. |
| 3.. Give me joy in my heart,  keep me singing,  give me joy in my heart, I pray;  give me joy in my heart,  keep me singing,  keep me singing till the break of day. | 4.. Give me love in my heart,  keep me serving,  give me love in my heart, I pray;  give me love in my heart,  keep me serving,  keep me serving till the break of day. |
| Chorus: *Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,*  *sing hosanna to the King of kings!*  *Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,*  *sing hosanna to the King!* | A Sevison  Ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 |

**A sending out prayer**

Heavenly Father,

All through the Bible,

we see the power of words.

You spoke and it was so.

As we leave this place,

May we be aware of what you are telling us through you word

And through the words of other Christians.

May we be aware of our words.

May the Holy Spirit guide us,

so that what we say .

builds up your kingdom,

and breaks down barriers.

This we ask in Jesus’ name.

Amen.