

Lenten Devotional February 26, 2021

Scripture

John 3:22-36

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized—24 John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease." 31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. 34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Christie Sweeny Gravelly '16

Can't you hear the resentment and envy in the words of John's followers: "But John, everyone is now going to *him*"? To them, Jesus' building popularity posed a threat to John's ministry. So it was entirely natural for them to ask, "What about Jesus, Master? He is baptizing. He has taken a page from *your* book; he is using *your* method—and *everyone is going to him!*"

But what an astonishing reply they get back from faithful John. When other men would have found some subtle way to express their envy, John says, "It was all the Lord's doing. The Lord called me to this ministry. But I am merely the forerunner to this Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. The age of the Messiah is dawning over the world."

This situation, where crowds are flocking to Jesus, was only the beginning. John knew that it must continue to be like that until everyone was with Jesus and no one was left with John himself. "Jesus must increase, I must decrease." Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of sinners; John is not. Jesus is the Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit; John is not. Put simply, if Jesus is the Son of God now come into the world to take away our sins, then it is not enough that we simply acknowledge these things to be true. Our lives must be the demonstration of our faith, a response of heart and mind. Our commitment to Jesus must put him in the position of ascendancy in our lives. He absolutely must have the first place in our hearts. "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we draw closer to the cross in this Lenten season, we, like the disciples, seek to understand the mystery of Jesus Christ, who draws all people to himself. Though we do not deserve your mercy, we nevertheless receive it with thankful hearts. Help us to trust that you give us what we truly need, for you are the One who made us. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.