

Pastoral Reflection  
The Baptism of Jesus

John the Baptist is one of the great characters of scripture, and I love the relationship between him and Jesus. We can spin out so much from the few instances of interaction between the two. What is often left unsaid or ignored is how likely it is that Jesus was John's disciple, long before he had his own. Indeed, also likely is that many of Jesus's disciples were probably John's to begin with as well. This idea that Jesus is shaped and formed by John is important; Jesus didn't appear out of nowhere to impress and confound crowds, infuriate established leaders, and extend words and actions of hope to all those who were being crushed under the wheel of power. He came to John first, a seeker, a questioner, maybe bored with what he knew in Nazareth or angry about the Roman occupation of his land or disdainful of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his time. Something drove him out to the Jordan and to John.

And probably like many in the crowd at the river watching and listening to and living alongside John, Jesus was moved, inspired, caught up in the excitement and promise of John's preaching, his social critique, his radical counter-cultural movement, and the way he challenged power. And so he goes into the water, to be baptized, to drown the old and to emerge as something new.

What we know is that what happens next changes everything. Jesus comes up out of the water, is addressed by God, and leaves the Jordan to spend 40 days in the desert trying to make sense of what just happened to him. And then he starts his own nonviolent campaign to proclaim the reign of God.

It feels so normal to me, so "of course". Who hasn't been bored or fed up or disenchanted with the way things are? Who hasn't at some time or another gotten swept up in hope by someone or something that promises change or meaning or revolution? And who hasn't learned something about themselves or their world, some new knowledge that shakes things up and demands we recalibrate, turn-around, make a new start, live differently at some point in our life? Jesus shares this with us. He is the Emmanuel promised at Advent, the God-with-us. And for us he is our John, just as John was for him. He's leading us out from all that we have known and come to expect to a place where our lives can be stirred up, turned upside-down and we start to imagine how different things could look, the possibility of a new way to live and to be. And then he says, "Follow me."

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