

January 12, Baptism of the Lord C (Luke 3:15-17, 21-22)

As clear as John is about his role, he still relies on the community for a more robust expression of his calling.

by [Charisse R. Tucker](#) in the [January 2025](#) issue

Published on January 6, 2025

“We are the ones. / We are the ones. / We’ve been waiting.” These words, wrapped in layered melody rising from the voices and witness of Sweet Honey in the Rock, met me one morning, first in memory and then on Spotify. “We are the ones. . . . / We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” Their sound held the kind of rhythmic calm and balm my unsettled soul needed.

These days I find myself stalled at a bit of a crossroad, the heart of it being the contour and function of calling in this season. Though I once believed these kinds of matters had long been settled, the last couple of years—intensified by pandemic--inspired anxiety, several health issues, and work-related burnout—have brought with them some inconvenient uncertainty and questioning. But Sweet Honey in the Rock’s lyrics, inspired by June Jordan’s “Poem for South African Women,” seem to hold both insight and direction for these strange days.

Before that morning, I never paid attention to the fact that the first part of the song is structured as call and response. The lead singer announces their arrival in a way that suggests a sense of clarity about both identity and purpose. The announcement calls forth a response: “We’ve been waiting.” This call-and-response communal exchange, expressed often in African American music and preaching traditions, highlighted something that I had forgotten, or maybe had never before fully taken in: calling, however personal or individualized the assignment, is always fleshed out in community.

John the Baptist is marked by the Divine before he draws his first breath. And although Luke does not fill in the details about his early years, when we meet him

again it becomes clear to us that it is clear to him that he has a mission to live out. There seems to be a sense of urgency for John. Maybe it's the focus that he gets after spending time alone in the wilderness. Maybe it's the way the message from God finds him. Maybe it's because of the times and the way that those in power are impacting the lives of his community in real time.

Whatever the reason, he seems to be firing on all cylinders. He is clear about his mandate, his message, his audience. And his clarity draws out a response from the community—one of questioning and curiosity and maybe also hope-filled anticipation, tinged with just a smidgeon of anxiety. The people are wondering if John is the one they've been waiting for. They are asking themselves if he is the one who has been promised to save them. His impact has clearly set him aside as someone to watch, but savior? Is he the one, in a time of unrest, who will rescue them?

Their questioning makes sense. Their excitement is understandable. The search for rescue in trying times is nothing to scoff, especially not when lives are on the line. But John's clarity about his role compels the community to get clear about theirs as well. Rescue is on the way, but not from where they imagined. John is not the one who will save them, but he points them to the one who is.

As clear as John is, he still relies on the community for a more robust and complete expression of his calling. And as uncertain as the community is, their reliance on John and his message will be key to their stepping into their own power—not merely as the people who will be saved but as those who will be empowered by the Savior to do their own work and make their own mark. They all have been waiting for each other. They all, whether or not they yet know it, are the ones they've been waiting for.

These times of ours are replete with crisis, distress, and upheaval. Some of the cares cross our screens, bringing faces and issues from faraway places. Others find us in familiar locations: across dinner tables, in doctor's offices or boardroom meetings, at supermarkets or our children's schools. For those of us who don't see ourselves as having what is needed to fix what is broken, heal what is wounded, or transform what has been gnarled beyond recognition, it is easy to seek and wait for others—for the ones with the answers, the gifts, or the power to change everything. It can even seem reasonable when the stakes are high to minimize or dismiss the significance of our own gifts and calling and instead just defer to the people who already possess

the charisma, following, or influence to get things done.

But John and the community around him remind us that we all have a role to play. John has his. Jesus has his. And though they may realize it, the community gathered has a role to play as well. There is a part of my own wrestling in this season that I've been trying to figure out in isolation. I, along with my introverted tendencies, much prefer to do my work in private and then come out in public all together and fixed. But God has so interwoven us together that some truths can only be known, some mysteries can only be solved, when we do it in community together.