Voice in the Wilderness

Voice in the Wilderness — John the Baptist Skit (10 min)

WHAT

A modern small town wakes up on a Tuesday to find a wild-eyed man in a rough camel-hair coat standing in the middle of the town square. He is shouting. He is also eating something brown and crunchy out of a leather pouch. The mayor comes to move him along. A reporter comes to interview him. Two bystanders argue about whether to call the police or buy him a sandwich. A child wanders over and stays. Every adult asks him the same question: who are you. His answer never changes. By the end of the morning the adults have all gone back to their meetings. The child is still standing in the square. So is the man. And the child believes him.

THEME

The kingdom of heaven still arrives the way it always has — through one strange voice the grown-ups try to schedule around.

WHO

JOHN — The voice. Wild hair, camel-hair coat, leather belt, leather pouch of dried locusts. Calm in his eyes, urgent in his mouth. Never angry, never apologizing.

MAYOR HAYES — Town mayor. Mid-fifties. Practical. Has a coffee in one hand and a permit clipboard in the other.

REGAN — Local reporter. Twenty-eight. Phone out, recording. Ambitious in a small-town way.

BYSTANDER 1 — Carl. Retiree. Carries strong opinions and a folded newspaper.

BYSTANDER 2 — Marcy. On her way to work. Tired. Kind.

ELLA — Age eight. Yellow raincoat. Carrying a juice box. Not in school because of a dentist appointment.

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

The town square of Anywhere, USA, on a slightly overcast Tuesday morning. A bench, a planter, a lamppost, a faint sound of traffic. John stands center stage from the moment the lights come up — everyone else enters around him. The tone is Sunday-school comedy. The adults play their certainty as the joke. John plays his certainty as the gospel. The child plays both as obvious. Hold the final beat long enough for the audience to sit in it.

PROPS

- A camel-hair-style coat (brown shaggy throw works)
- A wide leather belt
- A leather pouch with brown crunchy snack (pretzels, granola)
- A clipboard with a fake permit form

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- A reporter's smartphone on a small handheld gimbal
- A folded newspaper
- A juice box with a bent straw
- A coffee cup with a town logo

TIME

10 minutes

Scene 1 — Tuesday Morning

(Lights up on a town square. Bench, planter, lamppost. JOHN stands dead center, eyes lifted slightly, shouting at no one in particular. He pauses to take a crunchy bite from his leather pouch, chews thoughtfully, then resumes.)

JOHN (full voice, calm)

Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

(He chews. A car horn somewhere. He swallows.)

JOHN

Repent. The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

NARRATOR: It is 8:42 a.m. on a Tuesday in a town that has plans for the day. John has been standing in this exact spot since sunrise.

Scene 2 — The Mayor Arrives

(MAYOR HAYES strides in from stage left, coffee in one hand, clipboard in the other. She stops a respectful distance from JOHN.)

MAYOR HAYES

Sir. Sir, good morning. I'm Mayor Hayes. I run this town. Could I see your permit?

JOHN

I do not have a permit.

MAYOR HAYES

Right. Yeah. I figured. Public assembly in the square requires a permit. It's a form. Twelve dollars. We can get you set up by Thursday.

JOHN

By Thursday it will be too late.

MAYOR HAYES (politely)

Too late for what, sir.

JOHN

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The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

MAYOR HAYES (writing on the clipboard)
Okay. And — sorry — what's the name on the permit. Who are you?

JOHN
I am a voice.

MAYOR HAYES
A voice.

JOHN
A voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

MAYOR HAYES
I'm going to put down John Doe. We'll figure it out. Have a blessed day, sir.

(She walks off briskly, already on her phone.)

Scene 3 — The Reporter

(REGAN bustles in from stage right, phone up, recording, walking sideways toward John.)

REGAN (into phone)
Hey friends, Regan here, live from the town square where we've got a developing situation. Sir — sir, can I get a quick word? Regan Patel, Channel Six dot com. Who are you and what's the message today?

JOHN
I am a voice. The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

REGAN
Got it. Got it. Love that. And what's the platform here. Are you with a church? A movement? Is this a TikTok thing?

JOHN
I am a voice.

REGAN
Sure. And the voice is — sorry — affiliated with what organization, sir?

JOHN
Repent. The Lord is coming. He is mightier than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.

REGAN (to phone)
Folks, I'm going to be honest, this is a stronger pull quote than I expected before nine a.m. Sir, one more — what's your name. Just for the chyron.

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JOHN
I am a voice.

REGAN
Right. Voice. Yeah. I'll figure it out in post.

(She backs away, still filming, and almost trips over the planter.)

Scene 4 — Carl and Marcy

(BYSTANDER 1 (CARL) and BYSTANDER 2 (MARCY) enter from opposite sides, meet in front of the bench, and stop to stare at JOHN.)

CARL
Marcy. Are you seeing this.

MARCY
I am seeing it, Carl.

CARL
Somebody should call somebody.

MARCY
He looks hungry.

CARL
He's eating. Look at the bag. I think those are bugs.

MARCY
They are not bugs, Carl.

CARL
Sir. Sir. Are those bugs.

JOHN
Locusts and wild honey.

CARL
Marcy. They're bugs.

MARCY (stepping closer)
Sir, who are you? Do you have somewhere to go? Can we call somebody for you?

JOHN
I am a voice. The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

CARL
He keeps saying the same thing.

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MARCY (gently)
Maybe it's the only thing worth saying, Carl.

CARL
Don't get philosophical at me before nine.

(Carl walks off shaking his newspaper. Marcy lingers a beat, then leaves the other way, looking back over her shoulder.)

Scene 5 — Ella

(ELLA enters slowly from stage left, juice box in hand, yellow raincoat too big for her. She walks right up to JOHN. She is not afraid. She tilts her head.)

ELLA
Hi.

JOHN (softer)
Hello.

ELLA
Why are you yelling.

JOHN
Because somebody needs to.

ELLA
Who are you.

JOHN
I am a voice.

ELLA
Like on the radio.

JOHN
A little. The radio in the wilderness.

ELLA (nodding)
What is the voice saying.

JOHN
The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

(Ella considers this for a long, child-sized moment.)

ELLA
Okay.

JOHN

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Okay?

ELLA
I will get ready.

(She offers him her juice box. He looks at it. He laughs once — a startled, real laugh. He takes it.)

JOHN
Bless you, child.

ELLA
What does that mean.

JOHN
It means I asked the King to remember your name.

ELLA
Okay.

Scene 6 — The Mayor Comes Back

(MAYOR HAYES jogs back in, phone wedged between shoulder and ear, clipboard flapping.)

MAYOR HAYES (to phone)
Hold on, hold on. Sir — Mr. Doe — I have your permit started. We just need a contact number. An emergency contact. Anything.

JOHN
He is mightier than I. He is coming after me. I baptize with water. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

MAYOR HAYES
Sir, that is not a phone number.

ELLA (to the mayor, helpfully)
He is a voice.

MAYOR HAYES
Honey, where is your mother.

ELLA
At the dentist. I am with the voice now.

MAYOR HAYES
Please find your mother. Sir, please move along by ten or I will have to call —

(Her phone rings again. She answers, walking off, gesturing wildly.)

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Scene 7 — Regan's B-Roll

(REGAN circles back through, filming JOHN from a flattering low angle.)

REGAN (to phone)

Okay folks, an update — I have been told by the mayor's office that this gentleman is unaffiliated, unpermitted, and possibly eating insects. A real Tuesday. Sir, last question — what do you want people to know.

JOHN

Repent. The kingdom of heaven is near. Get ready.

REGAN

And — for me — what does that mean. Like, in real life.

(John lowers the leather pouch. He looks straight at her. The performance drops out of his voice.)

JOHN

It means the King is closer than your next breath. Stop running. Turn around. He is coming down the road behind me. I am only the one shouting that the road is His.

(Regan's phone hand drops slowly. She forgets she is recording.)

REGAN (small)

Okay.

(She walks off without saying goodbye, looking at her shoes.)

Scene 8 — Carl's Sandwich

(CARL re-enters carrying a wrapped deli sandwich. He hands it to JOHN without looking at him.)

CARL

It's turkey. Marcy made me come back.

JOHN

Thank you, Carl.

CARL

How do you know my name.

JOHN

Marcy said it.

CARL

Right.

(Carl stands awkwardly. He almost leaves. He does not leave.)

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CARL
What's the kingdom of heaven, exactly. In your version.

JOHN
It is the place where the King is in charge. It is breaking in. I am telling you because I do not want you to miss it.

CARL
Why me.

JOHN
Because you came back.

(Carl swallows. He nods once. He walks off, slower than he came.)

Scene 9 — The Square at Noon

(Lights shift slightly warmer — noon. The square is empty except for JOHN and ELLA, who has sat down on the bench with her juice box.)

ELLA
Voice.

JOHN
Yes, child.

ELLA
Why doesn't anybody else stay.

JOHN
Because they have meetings.

ELLA
I have a dentist.

JOHN
But you stayed.

ELLA
Yes.

JOHN
That is the kingdom of heaven.

ELLA
That I stayed?

JOHN
That somebody did.

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(Ella swings her legs. She thinks.)

ELLA
I will tell my mom about you.

JOHN
Tell her about the One coming behind me. He is the one to remember.

ELLA
Okay. What is His name.

JOHN (softly, with reverence)
His name is Jesus.

ELLA
Okay.

Final Moment — The Square at One

(ELLA's mother (offstage voice) calls her name from the wings. Ella hops off the bench. She looks back at John.)

MOTHER (offstage)
Ella! Time to go, baby!

ELLA
Bye, Voice.

JOHN
Goodbye, Ella.

(She runs offstage. John stands alone in the empty square. He lifts the half-eaten juice box to his chest, almost like a chalice. He looks down the road. He smiles, very small, only for himself.)

JOHN (quietly, only to the road)
Prepare ye the way of the Lord. He is coming. He is almost here.

(Lights down on the square. Hold the dark a beat longer than feels comfortable.)

END

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