



Testify to the Light

Third Sunday of Advent (Love)

John 1:6-8

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

December 17, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures - Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11, Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28

I'm sure that most folks who are regular attendees at church services during the various seasons of the year have pretty well figured out the theme that dominates each one. So, with that, when you hear the notice that we are in the midst of the Advent season, your mind usually returns to the theme of waiting. We are indeed in the middle of the season, the third Sunday, in fact. So, it might be interesting to explore why this notion of waiting predominates. There are two reasons: First, the dominant reading is almost always taken from the Prophet Isaiah who spoke to the exiled Israelites in Mesopotamia where they had been isolated for over 80 years. Some simply decided to stay because living was good; others, the more conservative number, continued to hope for release, which eventually did come through the help of the king of Persia, Cyrus. It was to these people who longed to go home that Isaiah spoke.

So, if one wishes to find a foundation for the notion of waiting, Isaiah the prophet is a reliable source.

However, if we wish to explore the more philosophical side of waiting, all we need do is reflect on life in this world as we experience it. It is obvious that we do more waiting than we do anything else in our every day existence. Think of an ordinary day and think of all the times you simply could not fulfill some task you planned to do because you were not able to control the circumstances within which you lived. Waiting for the family to get ready for church, waiting for the train to go to work; waiting for the teenagers to come home from a date; waiting for that promised raise or transfer. These circumstances go on and on and if we are reasonable people we simply get used to it and admit that this is part of life as we live it.

The folks who are affected by the unfinished business of life of course are those who are poor, those who have little control over their existence, those who may be incarcerated, those simply who are dependent upon others to release them from this condition of life.

Isaiah the prophet, in fact, does list some of the unfortunate ones in today's first reading. He proclaims that God has sent him "to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord."

In the gospel we hear the famous John The Baptist preaching the same message: "*I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord.*"

The point that both writers stress is that waiting is not necessarily an impossible condition of life. They both assume that while we wait, we here on earth can do something about the abusive conditions that may prevail. In other words, there are

some conditions that are simply part of the unfinished business of life; but on the other hand, there are certain other situations wherein we can lessen the suffering that accompanies waiting. In short, we do have some control over our life.

Sadly enough, however, the conditions described by Isaiah and John the Baptist never seem to change. So many people in the world today seem to suffer the same inhumanities: think for instance of the conditions in the Middle East, the very same land Isaiah and John spoke of centuries ago. Once again, millions of people are displaced, robbed of their home and land, destined to live in ways no one deserves to live. When one compares their plight to ours, then our waiting at the gas pump and in line at the market does not seem so important.

Granted, of course, that the conditions we speak of here are worldwide and that we are limited in our capacity to make any long-term changes. Nonetheless, we can at least learn from such situations: we can decide to stop moaning and groaning over the small irritable situations that inconvenience us. We can learn that waiting is simply part of the human condition. In other words, get used to it; make something good come out of it.

So, while I think of it, perhaps our Christian season of Advent is not simply a time of waiting for the Christ child, but rather a time to learn that Christ himself, during his own life, did not have the power to change all the things that disturbed him.

So, Christ continues to wait and so do we. Ultimately, it is what we try to do with our waiting that really counts.

Testify to the Light

When approaching an airport in low light conditions, a pilot is trained to look for the airport's beacon. You've surely seen them as well. They are particularly noticeable near a smaller airfield where roads often pass by in close proximity. Often when there are some low level clouds lingering about, you'll see the white and green beams streaking across the sky. From the air, these lights are visible from many miles away, helping a pilot flying under Visual Flight Rules get their bearings and begin the approach process. If you can't see the beacon at the airport, you can't legally land there under VFR.

The beacon image came to mind this morning as I was reading John's version of the John the Baptist story. The lectionary assigns selected verses from John 1 (6-8, 19-28), including three from the familiar and beloved prologue. With its dual themes of Word and light, the prologue sets up for the reader the theological foundation of John's Gospel. The preexistent Word was sent into the world to shine the light of God for all people. In our text for Sunday, John is careful to note that John the Baptist is not the light, but rather "he came as a witness to testify to the light."

Both the noun "witness" and the verb "to testify" are translated from the same Greek root, martyr. John was the witness of the light who was to witness about the light. To stretch the flying metaphor above, JBap had been given the ability to see the beacon of God's work in Christ, and was called to get on the radio to tell anyone with who would listen where to find the light. He was calling everyone back to their home field. He was inviting them all to see the light shining in the darkness of the world.

As disciples of Jesus in the 21st century, we are inheritors of this primary vocation. We are called to share the Good News of Jesus; to help our family, friends, and neighbors to see the beacon that is so often obscured by the fog of fear, anger, hurt, and regret. As followers of Jesus, we are to carry that light out into the world to help people see that in the light of Christ there is life, and that life is abundant with joy, compassion, grace, hope, and love. The world is in a constant state of low light conditions, but with the light of Christ, Christians are called to shine in the darkness, for as we hear in the prologue, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.