

Mission Reflection

for the Season of Advent

Seafarers International House



Scripture

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light”¹

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.” They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”²

Message

John the Baptist’s response is disarmingly humble. “I am [just] a voice in the wilderness. . . I am not worthy [even] to untie his sandals.” John reveals little of himself and is, instead, focused on Jesus. Commentators suggest that John the Baptist’s powerful witness lends credibility to Jesus’ movement.³

Lending credibility to the Word is a little unsettling. The presentation of John the Baptist in John 1:19-34 challenges us to examine how our words and actions testify to our beliefs and what those beliefs communicate.⁴

These words of John the Baptist are not likely to appear in a televangelist’s script, and they certainly don’t sound much like our publicly pious people in the news today who would attest that God agrees with their political, social, or even religious view.

Testimony is understood to be a public statement about something we’ve seen, heard or otherwise experienced. The problem is that the focus of a witness or faith story may become misplaced. *What has God done with me? How have I*

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known God? Who are we really talking about - God or ourselves? Even if we are careful to keep the emphasis on God and retain only a peripheral role for ourselves, our testimony is apt to reveal only our perspectives and attitudes. This may explain why Lutherans are typically reticent about offering faith testimonies. It's not always clear which of our experiential reflections emanate from us and which emanate from God.

We do not get to choose our testimony and how God is at work in our lives. In this life, each of us goes through trials and tribulations. Throughout it all, the Holy Spirit is at work encouraging us in faith and sustaining us.⁵ God brings resurrection to us in a variety of ways.

Prayer

In this season of Advent, we are called to wait and to watch. Help us, Lord, to pause and listen, so that when the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we will be ready and receptive to testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

1. John 1:6-8
2. John 1:19-28
3. Jan Schnell Rippentrop, "Commentary on John 1:6-8, 19-28", WORKING PREACHER, Luther Seminary, Chicago IL November 19, 2017
4. Gilberto Ruiz, "Commentary on John1:19-34", WORKING PREACHER, Luther Seminary, Chicago IL December 29, 2013
5. John and Robin McCullough-Bade, DAILY DISCIPLESHP, June 10, 2007

Postscript: Amid all the exuberance in the days and weeks before Christmas, there are moments of quietude and wonderment. We may be our best selves at this time of year. So give some thought to enlarging your shopping list and your baking plans by filling a Christmas-at-Sea gift satchel and baking some cookies for seafarers. Then they too may be able to feel the quietude and wonderment of the Season. Log onto www.sihnyc.org for more information.

Seafarers International House is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. We offer pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."

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