

Advent 3 12/17/23
John 1:6-8, 19-28 B

“THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. HE CAME AS A WITNESS, TO BEAR WITNESS ABOUT THE LIGHT, THAT ALL MIGHT BELIEVE THROUGH HIM.”

My nightly reading these last weeks has been a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte that my son recommended to me. Napoleon was quite a good general, who conquered a good share of Europe, but at the same time, I think it fair to say humility did not reside in Napoleon. He ended up exiled on the island of St. Helena. Know who lived with him in his exile? His wife? No, she went home to her father. His most valued chief of staff who shared in his victories? No, he deserted Napoleon without saying a good-bye. And, two of his most trusted marshals openly insulted him at the end.

Ingratitude, you say. Maybe not. For in looking out for # 1, Napoleon himself set the example. He was famously said, “I care only for people who are useful to me, and so long as they are useful.”

What contrast we have to Napoleon before us this morning. If anyone should have been tempted to be self-centered, it was John the Baptizer. He was miraculously conceived in his mother’s womb. He was the one chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Evangelist Luke even tells us that the people were even questioning in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.

He was such a force in Judea that the Jewish authorities decided to send two delegations, one from the ruling council and another from the Pharisees, to investigate this phenomenon. They wanted to know who John was, what he was teaching and by what authority he was teaching

these things. In answer to their question, “[John] confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’” (v. 20).

John was not self-centered. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light of the world, Jesus. This Sunday, we learn from the witness and confession of John to point to Christ.

I. Our Self-centeredness shows itself all too well in the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death. The tragic death of Deputy Paul Martin reminds us that you don’t have to go to the big city to find the darkness of sin. In fact, you just need to look at your own heart and life. Marriage is treated as a curse. Our property is stolen and vandalized. Wagging tongues defame our good name and reputation with gossip and lies. In stead of being content with what God has given us, we are jealous of our neighbor and covet what God has them. The darkness of human hearts hates God and neighbor and wishes only harm and ruin upon one another.

II. “Hear our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation,” we pray in our Collect for today. The Good News of this Advent season is God hears our prayer and comes to lighten the darkness of our hearts and world by the gracious visitation of His son.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). In the verse immediately before our lesson begins, the Evangelist John writes, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5). The darkness of sin came into God’s creation only because of our self-centeredness. “Darkness” represents sin and all its curse upon His creation and our lives. But, the Good News of the Gospel is that darkness cannot “overcome” the Light of the Word.

The devil could not overcome the Light with sin and death. But, he tried. He tried when he convinced Herod to slaughter all the male children

in Bethlehem. He tried when he tempted the Seed of woman in the wilderness. He tried when he persuaded the masses in Nazareth to drive Jesus from their town and tried to throw Him off the cliff. He won over the crowds that greeted the Savior as He rode into the city on the back of a donkey to days later cry, “Crucify Him!” Even as our Lord cried in death, “It is finished,” the foe thought he was triumphant.

But, he was not. By His death, Jesus crushed the devil’s head and sin, death, and the vile accuser’s hold on us was finished. Easter morning, He rose, bringing life and immortality to light. The darkness could not overcome the Light of the world.

III. Jesus, the light of the world, shined through John and He continues to shine through you and me today. You have been sent by Christ Himself to be a witness to the Light.

In the blessed washing of your Baptism, God makes you new in Christ. Through the water and the Word, God the Holy Spirit works faith and so creates in you new spiritual life with the power to overcome sin, so that you can be a witness to the Light of Christ with your thoughts, words, and deeds.

When the priests and Levites came from Jerusalem to John, “He confessed, and did not deny but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’” When John was asked, “Who are you?...What do you say about yourself?” John replied with the words of Isaiah the Prophet, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (vv. 20-23). John rejected all the self-centered temptation to please his flesh so that he could direct people to the Light of the world.

Who are you? What are you? I think it’s fair to say we tend to see ourselves according to our relationship in this world – husband, wife,

parent, grandparent, student, coal miner, retired. But, more than any of these, you are the light of the world, reflecting and shining the Light of the World, Christ.

But, that is not an easy thing to do. Our sinful flesh clings to us. Our flesh tempts us to live for self, to put its wants and desires first. Our flesh wants people to see us. Our flesh wants to be popular with the world.

This is the daily struggle of the Christian faith. On this side of heaven, we feebly struggle in the Church Militant. Do you, with your thoughts, words, and deeds, point to Christ or do you allow the world to squeeze you into its mold, pressuring you to live your life for self, as your flesh so wants to do?

Let us learn from the witness and confession of John. John was a sinner, like you, like me, like all of us. But, God called him to faith in Christ. God gave him strength and power to overcome sin so that he could point to Christ with all of his life.

“Who are you? What do you say about yourself?” Daily, we are tempted to have our flesh stand in the way of pointing to Christ. Daily, we fall into sin to do what pleases us. Daily, we fail to direct our neighbors to Christ.

So daily, we return to the waters of our baptism in repentance. God forgives and raises us to new life in Christ. He feeds us with his grace through the hearing of His Word and in the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood so that in our thoughts, words, and deeds, people will see Christ.

How do you point to Christ? We identify ourselves with Christ, we show that He is our Master, we point to Christ not simply by the words we speak, but by the life we live. We allow nothing to distract from Christ.

When the conversation turns to one who has died or when you are

visiting with someone who has just lost a loved one, share with them the joy of eternal life in heaven that we have in Christ.

When you are visiting with someone struggling with cancer, or arthritis, or another affliction, share with them how God gives us strength to bear our crosses and how He gives us the hope of heaven, where He will wipe all tears from our lives and all earthly sorrows will be gone.

Believe the promises of God's Word. Obey the laws of the civil government. Love and obey your parents. Husbands and wives, love and honor your spouse. Workers and employees, be faithful in the performance of the duties of your employment. To all, be content with what God has entrusted to you and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39).

The pink candle is burning on our Advent wreath. Pink symbolizes joy. Paul writes in our Epistle, "Rejoice always" (v. 16). My Dear Friends in Christ, whatever our circumstances, we can be joyful. We can be joyful because Christ has come to save us from all the threatening perils of our sins, including death itself. As we journey by faith through this wilderness darkened by sin, the Light of the World, lights our Way to heaven, where He will dwell with us and we will dwell with Him, forever and ever, without end. Amen.