

King of Glory Lutheran Church
December 16-17, 2017
Year B: Advent 3, John 1 “Witness!”
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God’s claim on our lives makes it clear about who we are and who we aren’t. In that, witnessing can bring us great joy!

God’s peace and joy be with you this day! Today is the third Sunday in Advent and we light the pink candle – to symbolize Joy! Therefore God’s peace and joy be with you this day!

The Jews sent priests and Levites to Bethany to ask John who he was. After all, his words were drawing crowds and they needed to find out if this man was friend or foe. So they ask him the question. “Who are you? Tell us plainly.”

We’ve all been asked that question, haven’t we? Who are you? And typically we answer with a few truths about our identity. Name. Birth place. Family status. These facts depict who we are.

John the Baptist begins by saying *who he is not*. Interesting, isn’t it?

“I am not the Messiah.”

“Are you Elijah?” “I am not!”

“Are you the prophet?” “No”

It’s helpful to be clear about who we are and who we are not.

In the midst of the ethereal mystery of The Gospel of John’s first verses, “In the beginning was the Word and the word was God and the word”, we read what sounds vaguely like a courtroom scene. “Who are you? Tell us!” But remember that the whole of John’s Gospel is written “But these things are written so that you may believe in the Messiah, and by believing have life in His name.” (John 20:31) The writer of John’s Gospel wants to help us believe – everything must point to Jesus.

Which is what John the Baptist does. He came to testify to the Light. He himself was not the light. But he came to testify to the light. John the Baptist, a name he never would have claimed for himself, keep pointing people to Jesus. He was a witness.

“The defense calls its next witness, Fred Franks to the stand.”

“Tonight standing on the banks of the rising Mississippi, we hear from Channel 9 correspondent, Sharon Strasburg. Sharon.”

“The police are having a difficult time and staying longer than usual at this crime scene because there were no eye witnesses.”

I think my favorite witnesses are those people companies hire to stand on street corners and wave the signs. Like the men and women dressed up as the statue of liberty from Liberty Tax Services. Who knew that Lady Liberty could break dance?! There was an African American standing on the corner of 287 and 29th, right by Appleby’s one afternoon. African American bodies move so beautifully – way different than we Caucasians. He had his ear buds in and was just dancing and smiling – I have no idea what company he represented. But I remember his witness! It was joy.

John the Baptist was a witness. He wasn’t the light. He pointed to the Light. His job was to point to Jesus. And John was clear about who he was.

It’s helpful to know where we begin and where we end. Remember the “I Love Lucy” TV series? Scatterbrained Lucy would get herself into the strangest situations because she often forgot where who she was. “Well I just thought if I could” And we can hear Ricky responding, “Lucy, how could you think that?! You are not.....”

For we who follow God, our identities begin and end at the font. In baptism, we are claimed, marked and sent out into the world to witness to God until we come to live in the presence of God. That is our identity. This is our witness.

So if I come up to you and say, “Who are you?” and you respond, “Child of God,” then you’ve got it. If you say, “Green Bay Packers fan,” well we’ve still got a ways to go.

We’re not God. We’re not Jesus. Our lives are meant to point to them, just like John the Baptist was pointing to Jesus.

And what makes it so much easier is when we know who we are and who we are not.

We can say to ourselves, “I am not the Savior. I cannot save myself. Jesus is the Savior.”

We can say, “I am not perfect. Jesus was perfect. Jesus loves me right now, as I am.”

We can say, “I am not God. I don’t even play God on TV! My job is to have my life point to God.”

Whew! What a relief. When we know who we are and who we are not, then it becomes clear and much easier to do what we are called to do! In fact, it can give us great joy.

John knew that he was born subordinate to Jesus. “I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thongs on his sandals. He is greater than I.”

And yet, John allowed himself to be who God created him to be. The forerunner. The witness. The Baptizer of the Lord. Even though he knew he wasn't equal to Jesus, he still took his role seriously. He had a part to play. John baptized people and helped prepare their hearts. Then he baptized Jesus. Yet he was clear that he was not Jesus, he just played his part.

There was a staff person at a nursing home I visited recently. She graciously opened the door for me and we began a conversation. “How are you?” I asked. “I'm great!” “Really – how's that?”

She excitedly began telling me that she had decided to scale back this year on Christmas. “I'm not buying as many presents for the kids. I've told them not to expect as much. We're going to have a family day. I'm so much more relaxed and happy this year. I can't believe it!”

This woman knew was clear about where she began and where she ended in terms of Christmas. And it gave her the freedom to have joy again!

Sisters and brothers in Christ, right now our world is longing for people to be clear about who they are and who they are not. But to do it in such a way that brings conversation. Brings peace. Brings love, not division.

We as Christians have a particular witness to bring – and what a witness it is! Freed in Christ, we can be the people of God who say, there is a way to live with joy! A way to live with integrity and love and peace!

We're going to take a few minutes to practice being witnesses. We've done this sometimes during announcements. I'd like you to turn to a neighbor and share. Think back over your week – where was God present?

That's the first step. Notice. Then share.

John witnessed to Jesus! Let's witness too!

Amen.