

Advent 3 (B)
Pastor Ed Harkey

John 1:6-8 (19-23)
TLC, Keene, NH

[OPENING SLIDE]

*THE SAINTS OF THE SEASON: LUCIA
CONTENT TO BE A LIGHT*

*“[John] ... came as a witness, to bear witness ... about the light ...
that all might believe through him.”*

*“For Christ alone walks in the world and makes his path in the minds of his
saints, in which, as on bases of gold and foundations of precious stone the
heavenly Word has left his footprints ineffaceably impressed.”
(Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* 3.10.71-74)*

Introduction

[SLIDE #2] They are the essentials of good investigative reporting, where one seeks to answer the following questions: who, what, how, where, when and why.

2nd & 3rd Sunday of Advent bring us to answer the same questions: spurred on by the ministry of John the Baptist, but answers ultimately centered in Jesus.

Main Thought: Over every aspect of Advent ... “over every song, cantata, party, gift, service of worship, act of charity, let the church first say, ‘We are not the light but came to bear witness to the light. ... The Messiah has come, and it is Jesus.’ ... Even in Advent, we witness to the One who already stands among us, who has already come.” (Craddock, et. al. *Preaching through the Christian Year*, B, 20)¹

Let us forever be ...

[SLIDE #3]

CONTENT TO BE A LIGHT

Amen.

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¹ “Believers have a responsibility both *to be* persons who reflect the light of Christ and *to live* in such a way that our lives proclaim the light of Christ in the world.” (Riggs, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 1:72)

“From a pastoral perspective we want to ask who is present on this third Sunday of Advent and what hopes and fears we bring to this service.” (Bartlett, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 1:68)

Wherein, quickly we see that as much as Advent may be a time of introspection – how we prepare ourselves for the coming Christ – it is also about looking outward ... of focusing on Christ, the heart of our worship, and the fount of forgiveness, for us and for others for whom Jesus has come.

[SLIDE #4] To help us to do that, we return to the ... WHO? [Not the English rock band ... but John!]

⁶ ***There was a man sent*** [as in an official capacity, fully authorized for his mission, as on a mission²] ***from God, whose name was John*** [“the Lord is gracious/merciful”].

“Just as the name of Jesus describes what he would do ... so John’s name conveys John’s message.” (Pittelko, *CPR*, 4:1, 19) Yes, ask the Baptist who he is, and he will say “the Lord is merciful.”

[SLIDE #5] Indeed! He is to us all! Which is the real *who* of Christmas. Last week, I said, “You are the reason for the season.” But this season is not totally about you. It’s about Jesus. It’s always been about Jesus ... “the One whose sandals we are not worthy to untie,” but who is Jesus – “the Lord saves” – who demonstrates His grace to us, renaming each of us by Baptism – “the Lord is merciful.”³

Which makes Advent not about John. At least that’s what the other John (the apostle) writes about his namesake:

² Brauer, *CJ*, 12/15/2002, 454

³ Though John could well have touted his theological and priestly pedigree, he shies away from it all. Not unlike “Amos: ‘I am no prophet or a prophet’s son.’ Isaiah: ‘Depart from me, for I am a man of unclean lips.’ Jeremiah: ‘I am but a lad.’ The traditional Greek admonition ‘Know yourself’ surely means ‘Know who you are and who you are not.’” (Bartlett, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 1:70)

⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

[SLIDE #6] Yes, **WHAT** has John come to do? “To bear witness.”

Here, John “is not principally a baptizer, a prophet ... or even a messenger from God. John is a *martyria* (the word from which we get “martyr”), a witness, sent by God to testify to ‘the Word made flesh,’ ‘the Light’ that no darkness has or will ever extinguish.” (Charles, *Feasting on the Word*, B, 1:71)

Yes, it’s not about John at all. Unlike two southern belles visiting with one another, where one was clearly monopolizing the conversation. That when she finally took a breath, she said, “Well enough of me talking about myself, honey. Why don’t you talk about me for a little while?” (Weedon, *CPR*, 19:1, 15)

[SLIDE #7] To bear witness is not to draw attention to one’s self, but to point to another ... in this case, Jesus.

Wherein, “Scripture says that every matter must be established by at least two or three witnesses for it to be considered true. John (the apostle) lines up seven witnesses that testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God the Savior of the world.” (Cwirla, *CPR*, 13:1, 19) Of which one of them is John ... set apart and sent from God ... to give testimony not about Himself but Jesus.⁴

“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:5-6)

Yes, He is the real WHAT – that is, the heart and soul of John’s, the Church’s, and our own message, was ...

⁴ The others are “the Holy Scriptures, the works that the Father does through Jesus, Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit, the apostles, and St. John’s own Gospel.” (Cwirla, *CPR*, 13:1, 19)

⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[SLIDE #8] Light ... a key theme in Scripture, particularly as it pertains to Christ (esp. in John) ...

Wherein, “among all of God’s gifts light is one of the greatest for it brings order to the world (Psalm 43:3), curbs darkness (Psalm 139:11-12), points to life (Psalm 18:28; Job 33:30), and symbolizes the pleasures of life (gladness, Psalm 97:11; well-being, Isaiah 45:7; restoration, Micah 7:8-9; and new life in God, Psalm 34:5; Daniel 5:11). As a divine gift to the nations, Christ (the Light) illumines the Gentiles (Luke 2:32), fulfilling the promises of God to Abraham and Israel. Through Christ we become ‘sons of light’ (John 12:36).” (Brauer, *CJ*, 12/15/2002, 454)

[SLIDE #9] //Lucia ... from the Latin *lux*/Spanish *luz* ... so precious little of it these days ... not just meteorologically speaking, but spiritually speaking as well ...

Lucia/Lucy brings us to it ... a Christian woman under the Roman Emperor Diocletian’s reign ... chose to give away her dowry instead of to marry ... “Why give it away when you are forced to, rather than when you are willing?” ... betrayed by her potential suitor, who wanted the money more than a wife ... ultimately martyred by sword, when the fire set around her did not burn ... now associated with light (whose feast day was fixed on this date, which in the original calendar was thought to be the shortest day of the year) ... also with sight ... her own eyes gouged out [NB eyes on a saucer] ... now celebrated in some parts of the world with the eldest daughter of each family, going about town dressed in white with a red sash (for martyrdom), giving gifts to the girls of the town ... where amidst all the legends that came later ... what should not get lost is the light part ... as with John, both who point to the Light that is Christ, even now coming into the world ... hers, like his, another “voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord.’”

[SLIDE #10] So also our voice. **HOW?** With lights on, and gifts given ... all to point to, even as it flows from – one thing: Christ the Light of life, Christ, the Light of the world.

“God had caused his light to appear in the midst of a sin-darkened world in the person of Jesus, the Savior. John’s message was simply, ‘Don’t miss him!’” [*Sermon Studies on the Gospels*, B, 25]

“The increasing curttness of John’s successive utterances should not be missed. It appears to stem from a dislike for answering questions about himself. He had come to bear witness to Another” (Morris, 136).

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

So ... HOW? Not with “what God has done for me lately, because I’m so religious, but what God in Christ has done for you. Witnessing is not ‘Jesus loves me, this I know.’ That boasting – true and holy boasting, but boasting nonetheless. ‘Jesus loves you, this I know.’ That’s witnessing.” (Cwirla, 19)

“We are invited to follow Jesus – at a distance – more than to imitate him. ‘What would Jesus do?’ the button asks. He would walk on water, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. Our text suggests the better question: ‘What would Jesus have us do?’” (Bartlett, 70, 72)

[SLIDE #11] Just let the voice ring out. **WHERE?**

²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Just let the voice ring out. And let God do the rest.

Yes, let the voice ring out, wherever and whenever the Lord has put you. [SLIDE #12] So that others may know, so that others may see. As we point them to Jesus and say, “there, in Him, is your forgiveness, life and salvation. Yes, there, in Him is your freedom and your peace. Surely, we have met Him, amen? Surely we’ve met Him in the water of our Baptism. Surely we have met Him when we hear, with joy, that our sins are forgiven. Surely we have met Him at His banqueting Table. If those gifts have *any* meaning for us, why not for others? Why not point them to the same water, the same Word, the same Table? Where, ours, as David Bartlett notes, in his reflections on this Gospel, “We proclaim not ‘Believe or perish,’ but ‘Come and see.’” (72)

It’s what John eventually does. Wherein, a couple of days after the events recorded in this Sunday’s Gospel ... two of his followers – at John’s insistence take up to follow Jesus, whereupon seeing them, Jesus asks:

“What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.”

[SLIDE #13] Child of God, having enjoyed our “10th hour” and more with Him, John brings us back to a call still being issued forth, to bring others along for the journey. Says Frances Fernandez in his reflections on this Sunday’s readings: “People need to be convinced that Christ has really been born in Bethlehem, and few things are more convincing than the habitual happiness of the Christian, even in the midst of pain and contradictions.” (In Conversation with God, 1:118-119)

Which again is our WHY? Yes, for however 2020 began, let us resolve to end it where *every* year, past, present and future, begins and ends: with Jesus. Which is to say, as we are the why, so also is our neighbor, co-worker and friend.

Wherein, all told, and I'm sure you believe it ... Jesus is the greatest gift we could possibly give! He is ... the gift that keeps on giving!

Conclusion

[SLIDE #14] *Who, what, how, where, why and when?* The “who” is “the Lord is gracious.” The “what” – to bear witness to the Light. The “how” is simply to let our own light shine, issuing forth in an invitation to “*come and see.*” The “why” – so that all may come to know Him as we know Him ... *wherever* the Lord has placed you; as the “when” is now! “*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the **day of salvation.***” (1 Corinthians 6:2)

[SLIDE #15] Where. John, Lucia and countless others before us have taught us “that the joy of the Church, and the joy of each of our lives, is found in the one who is among us, Immanuel, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Only in Jesus is there forgiveness of sins. Only in Jesus is the remedy for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. ‘*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*’ (John 1:29).” (Weedon, 16)

Having now joined John and Lucia in pointing others to Jesus, we may walk away from those encounters with great joy. Wherein, there was and is only one real given for us to do, as we await our Lord's return ... to go in His name. Yes –like John and Lucia –let us simply point others to the Savior, and then ... get out of the way!⁵ Ever remaining ...

[SLIDE #16]

CONTENT TO BE A LIGHT

Amen.

⁵ “One word of warning ... A witness is a martyr who testifies to his or her death. You might lose you head, as John did. But not to worry. You've already died in Jesus, you've been baptismally buried into his death. You are in the ultimate witness protection program, embraced by the death of the Son of God who loved you and gave himself up for you. ... Your life is safely hidden in Christ, tucked away where no one can take it. You've got nothing to lose.” (Cwirla, 20)