

## The Way of the Lord

### John 1:6-8, 19-28

I wonder why God did not and does not use a public relations firm to let the world know about the coming of and ministry of the Son. At Jesus' birth lowly shepherds; an angelic choir (only heard and seen by the shepherds); and foreign astrologers who followed a star that was unnoticed by all others; were the ones that told the good news. Now, at the beginning of his public ministry, his PR man is an unknown preacher's kid who has not been ordained or authorized by the religious establishment. In fact, the religious leaders send investigators to determine who John the itinerant preacher and baptizer really was.

Our text focuses on the role of John the Baptist, the witness sent by God to testify to Jesus as the light of the world, the Word (*Logos*) (present with God at creation, vv. 1-5) and the Word (who became human and walked the earth, v. 14). The testimony of John is about who Jesus is: incarnation; Jesus as the human embodiment of God and Jesus as the Christ.

John is a man sent by God to witness in history to Jesus who was present with God at creation and who will be the eternal presence of God within history. John did not simply announce the coming of another prophet, but he proclaimed the coming of the Word who embodied God's presence within the world. One Aramaic translation put it this way: "And the word took human form and dwelt [tented] among us; and we saw his preciousness [glory], a preciousness like that of an only beloved son of the Father, who is filled with loving kindness and justice." (1:14)

The religious authorities question John about his identity as they sought to ascertain the identity of the one about whom his message spoke. Interestingly, before the questions begin, John declared that he was not the Messiah. This declaration led the authorities to ask if he was one of those figures foretold in Scripture—Elijah or the prophet—who was to announce the coming of the Messiah. John said that he was neither of these figures, however his words did signify that he had a prophetic role as "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness" (v. 23).

The authorities turned next to challenge John because he was baptizing without the authority to do so. John was a forerunner to Jesus, and this established his authority to baptize with water. He understood, and he wanted the authorities to understand, that his actions were only preparatory in relation to the one whose identity they actually sought.

In the context of the Advent season, these verses remind us of our identity and our role as witnesses who must testify to Jesus' birth and ministry in the midst of the ever-encroaching consumerist claims regarding the meaning of Christmas. Like John we are to witness to the light of Christ as a voice in the wilderness of twenty-first-century consumerism. As voices in the wilderness, we must make a countercultural claim that dislocates the consumption of things, even when we offer these things as Christmas gifts. We must tell our children, our family, and our acquaintances that the buying and wearing of brand-name items, that have become markers of our identities, is not what gives us value. Our countercultural claim that we are to give witness to is what being fully human means; the quest for our identity must be grounded upon the relationship we have to Jesus. Just as John knew who he was in relation to who Christ was, we must claim our identity, especially remembering that we are not the Christ but witnesses to

him. Our role in our time is, like John's role in his time, to confess who we are not and proclaim the One to whom we testify.

Also, like John we live as witnesses to the light of Christ, for the light of Christ is life (v. 4, "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people"). Therefore, as we testify to the light, we also embody that light as believers who reveal the life of Christ anew in the world this Advent season. To embody the light and reveal the life of Christ anew means that we are to live so as to nurture our capacity to love others, including our enemies—and to act humanely, offering compassionate and restorative justice. **Marcia Y. Riggs**

Last week I was in distress. Leroy had been in the hospital for a week and on Monday was scheduled to have more tests. You, my church family, gave words/witness of God's blessed assurance. During the week we received calls, cards and were aware that many were praying with and for us. God answered those prayers and Leroy sits with us in worship today. The way we were encouraged was by your witness!

I was telling Jean, after Leroy came home, of our witness of God's goodness. Thirty years ago Leroy was diagnosed with colon cancer. I had two children in elementary school and a toddler. Prayers were lifted up and my then 40 year old husband was given 30 more years of life. Leroy has been able to see those children grown and Isaac born and raised to adulthood. So we have no reason to fear! God has already fulfilled his promises and blessed us greatly. All current and future blessings are just like icing on the cake.

Our faithful response to this text can be found in the words of an African American spiritual, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." We Christians 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. **Marcia Y. Riggs**

As Christians our task is to share the good news that God sent his Son that we might have life and it more abundantly. We don't have to be anything that we are not (we don't have to be super Christians with no faults or failings)...just witnesses to God's love, grace, redemption and salvation. This is the way of the Lord!

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