

Isaiah 61:1-4;8-11  
Psalm 126  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24  
John 1:6-8; 19-28

Advent 3B  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
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### Pointing to the Light

One of the great beauties of the Advent season is that it will, if we let it, turn us inward and invite us into a quiet stillness that exists nowhere else. In this time when we wait with great hope for the one who will come to live among us and within us, our waiting offers us the opportunity to ponder what form God will take in us. And if we let it, Advent will settle around us like a soft cloak enfolding us in the exquisite possibility of everything we can be, because God has come among us. But all of that can only happen if we can find a way to wait and watch and wonder.

Waiting is hard for us. We aren't used to it, and for the most part, we don't do it willingly or well. We talked about this last week! When forced to wait for even the shortest time, we occupy ourselves with our phones - conversations, email, fun facts to know and tell from the web or double thumb typing, listing all of the things we could be doing if only we weren't waiting. Our lives are busy and complicated and important and over-committed and quite frankly, we simply don't have time to wait.

And when we are forced to wait for the big things – the results of the biopsy, the board meeting that will determine the future of our career, the college admissions committee letter, the phone call from the doctor's office, we distract ourselves with things far more serious than playing with our phones. It seems we'll do almost anything to avoid simply waiting. We do not like waiting because we prefer doing to being. We do not like waiting because it reminds us that we are not in control.

It's no wonder we hear from John the Baptist in Advent. He was the consummate waiter, a man who had let loose of all control. Homeless and wandering in the desert, smelling oddly of camel skins and honey, this man had been waiting his whole life and all the while crying out that God was coming and people get ready! Ever since that first leap of joy from within his mother's womb, John had been waiting for the One who would come and change everything, the One whose shoes he wouldn't even touch. And though he didn't know exactly what he was waiting for, he waited nevertheless. His waiting was active, filled with vision and the proclamation that God had come among us. And as it turned out, John's waiting was profoundly fruitful... because in the waiting, he was becoming more and more himself. It was in the waiting that John came to understand who he was and what he was called to do.

“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.” Having spent all that time waiting, John finally understood that his work in the world was to testify to the light, to point to the One who came into the world to love the world back into wholeness. It’s a job not unlike our own.

It might seem surprising to you that we’re a lot like John the Baptist. Oh I don’t mean the homelessness and the beard dripping with honey and the unfashionable camel skin outfit. But each one of us, as distinctly different as we are from John and from one another, each one of us share in his work of recognizing the true light, of making a pathway for that light to come into the world, and of testifying to it. Does that mean we stand on street corners crying out in the wilderness of our modern-day isolation and consumerism? Probably not. That might have been John’s job, but it is likely not ours. So what is our job then? What is it to know ourselves as people sent by God to testify to the light?

A good way to begin is to know who we are, and what we believe. That will likely require our prayers and some of that quiet and contemplative waiting. But in the waiting, we too will find that each one of us has a unique calling, a unique perspective, a unique voice that only we can offer. Each one of us is called to bring the Good News of Christ Jesus into the world in our own special way. And while we may not recognize it quite yet, we’ve been given everything we need to do that.

What matters most to you? What do you love the best about yourself? What makes you deeply happy? When do you feel useful, when do you feel free, when do you feel close to God? Who are you when you are your very best? These are the questions that begin to point us in the direction of discovering how we, the ones who are sent by God, can testify to the light. Living a Christian life, offering Christian witness doesn’t mean doing things or saying things or acting in ways that are uncomfortable or odd - quite the contrary. Testifying to the light happens best when we are our most authentic selves. What are your most authentic beliefs? Why are you a Christian? If your next door neighbor asked you what you believe, why you get up for church on Sunday mornings, why you cook for someone whose lifelong partner has died, or visit someone who is homebound, would you know what to say? Could you connect the goodness in your heart to the love of God in Christ Jesus? Why are you a Christian? What is your testimony? These are simple questions, but the answers aren’t easy. I know this because as this sermon came to life, I realized that I needed to be able to answer those questions too.

Finding my answers involved waiting and praying and reflecting on my own true nature. And because I am quite seriously asking you to answer this question for yourselves and for the sake of the ones who do not yet know God’s boundless and unspeakable love, I realized that I needed to answer the question too. I am a Christian because love is who Jesus Christ is and love is the only thing worth living for. I am a Christian because Jesus teaches me to give my life away in kindness, compassion, justice, mercy and peace, all of which can only come through his love. I am a Christian because I have seen God at work in my life, in your lives and in the life of the

world in acts of unspeakable grace both great and small. I am a Christian because I want to be one who speaks in the language of love and holds hope for the world. I am a Christian because I have witnessed God's presence in the ugliest of circumstances, turning great pain and suffering into great love. I am a Christian because love is who our God is, and who God made me to be.

There it is – as simple and complex as all of that. While it's true that we are not Elijah, the Prophet or the Messiah, just like John the Baptist, each one of us is a witness to the light, and all of us have a hand in preparing the way, clearing the path, making a place, being a place for Christ to live and love in the world. And that is a very important job. What could possibly matter more than holding hope for the world, bringing light into the darkness, pouring love into the places of suffering and despair? Sometimes the Bible puts things in language that feels too holy for us, but we are God's people and our very nature is holy. Don't be put off by the gospel writer's language. Bearing witness to the light is what you do all the time. And it's important for you to be able to say so and to say why.

I suspect that most of us in this room have seen the glorious light of Christ, in the face of a child, in the beauty of a sunrise, in forgiving terrible transgressions, in being forgiven, in holy dying and rising again. And that stuff of daily life is the stuff that makes us the beautiful witnesses whose work and joy it is to share the light that shines in the midst of the tough stuff of our daily lives, and even to be the light for others. Perhaps you've known one of those beautiful witnesses, someone who knew what it was to testify to the light, one who would testify until the Kingdom comes, one whose life pointed to Jesus without hesitation. Perhaps that witness is you. Or perhaps there's a bit of a struggle in it for you. There's a trick, you know, a trick that makes it all pretty easy. We simply need to know who and whose we are. We only need to know that our work is to bear witness to the light, and that our own lights are light beyond all imagining. We only need to know that love incarnate wasn't just for Christ Jesus or even John the Baptist. My dears, we - you and I - are love incarnate, and that is about the most beautiful testimony imaginable.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John whose name was George whose name was Steve whose name was Mike whose name was Stu...

There was a woman sent from God whose name was Ellie, whose name was Joan, whose name was Barbara, whose name was Donna, whose name was Sara. She was not the light but she came to testify to the light. Amen