

3rd Sunday of Advent Year B
December 11, 2011
St. Luke Sheboygan Falls
John 1:6-8, 19-28

The Voice and the Light

Let us pray. Lord, speak to us that we may speak in loving echoes of your tone. As you have sought, so let us seek, your straying children, lost and lone. AMEN.

When priests and Levites from Jerusalem came to ask John the Baptist who he was, he surprisingly answered largely in terms of who he was not.

“I am not the Messiah. I am not Elijah returned from the dead. I am not a prophet.”

If you were to define yourself by who you are not, what kinds of things would you say? On the one hand, it seems rather self-effacing.

I’m not the main attraction.
Someone more important is coming along
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after me. I’m not that important. No need to pay any attention to little old me.

Somehow, just doesn’t strike me as that kind of person. The guy who emerged out of nowhere in a camel’s hair coat doesn’t seem like the shy retiring type. In fact, just the opposite. John doesn’t appear to be the type who was afraid to stand up for what he believed in or call others to account for the evil things he saw them doing. “Repent! Be baptized!” isn’t exactly the cry of a meek and mild guy.

Yet, at the same time, John acknowledges that there is a revolution going on and he is clearly NOT the eye of the storm. Someone else is. And John knows that his role is to get others ready for that coming event.

The one word John uses to describe himself is that he is the **voice**. He is a witness, a person who comes to testify to

the real deal, the main event, the one who is coming whose sandal he was not worthy to untie. Of course, we know the end of the story. We know the one John is talking about is Jesus. The one who later in John's Gospel will not define himself by what he is not, but by his connection to God, the great "I AM." As in ***"I am the Light of the world. The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world."***

"I AM" as in ***"I am the Good Shepherd."*** "I AM" as in ***"I am the Bread of Life."*** "I AM" as in ***"I AM the True Vine."*** "I AM" as in ***"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me."*** Whenever Jesus spoke the words "I AM" in John's Gospel, it was as good as saying "I AM GOD" because "I AM" was the name by which God identified himself to Moses in the Old Testament.

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John the Baptist was that guy who knew his place was to speak the words of introduction and then get out of the way of the one who would come after him to fulfill all those Old Testament prophecies he knew so well, like today's prophecy from Isaiah: ***"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted...to proclaim liberty to the captives...to comfort all who mourn."***

John's job was to let people know that this promised Messiah was coming soon, the anointed one of God and then to step aside. His job was to prepare for the one who would bring real hope and joy and light into the world.

Much like John, we are not meant to be the light, but to testify to the light as Christ's witness. We can all say with

certainty, “I am not the light.” “I am the voice of one speaking in Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.”

In today’s ever darkening world, Jesus continues to need witnesses to the light. I can’t help but think of my mom. She was a person who was never comfortable when the spotlight was on her. She was a behind the scenes person—a quiet witness. She spent her whole life taking care of others—my grandma, me, my dad. She was lost at first when my dad died, then I got married. Then she found her purpose, volunteering at the church’s Alley Shoppe, a free clothing store for those in need. She used her straightening skills to keep that place neat and organized. Her special joy was getting the toy room ready for the kids at Christmas time. That was her voice, her way of expressing God’s unconditional love

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for EVERYONE. It’s because of her, I followed the path to ministry.

During this Advent season, forget for a while about you. It’s not about what you need to receive. Christmas isn’t your birthday.

It’s not even about what you have to do, God already wrapped the most wonderful gift and laid it in a manger.

It’s about Jesus, the true light that enlightens everyone. You are a witness to that miracle, one unique voice sharing the good news where you are. How will you express yourself? AMEN.