

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28
DEC 14, 2014

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. . . .

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?" 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."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

At end of a play, when actors are taking their bows,
They always gesture up and into the darkness.
They are recognizing important participants in the play
who are not on the stage in the limelight
but who work to turn the lights on them.
This was the role of John the Baptist - and of us,
to focus on Jesus, the main character,
to point to him as the light of the world.
John's gospel emphasizes recognizing people for who they are.
especially recognizing Jesus for who he is.
We do this when we recognize ourselves for who we are,
needy people sitting in darkness.

PHARISEES SAW THEMSELVES AS GOD'S GUARDIANS
JOHN SAW HIMSELF AS A WITNESS TO THE LIGHT
JESUS IS SEEN AS THE LIGHT OF GOD HIMSELF

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“Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

In the play, “The Music Man,” the school board is constantly trying to get Harold Hill to produce his credentials.

Pharisees play similar role, guardians of what is true & right. Pharisees were actually experts on baptisms.

Their homes had big stone jars full of water for various ritual washings required to maintain purity and keep from being polluted by anything unclean.

They also had a baptism for gentiles converting to Judaism.

But now John said they needed to be baptized by him. They don't say it is so many words but they may be thinking,

“Who do you think you are, calling people to be washed out here in the wilderness in the muddy Jordan river, if they want to be washed, they should come home with us where we have clean water in our jars.

Pharisees saw it as their job to make sure everyone did right because this was their religion:

being saved by doing everything right.

So their focus was on themselves and what they did.

But the righteousness they were so carefully guarding was like a water jar that was cracked and broken so that all the cleanness/righteousness had leaked out.

We are all broken by sin. The impurity that ruins us isn't just something we must keep from coming from outside but is something that grows inside of us.

There are few today who are Pharisees in the sense of being obsessed with properly keeping all the rules.

But we may still remain focused on ourselves, thinking that our salvation, our goodness & worthiness comes from something inside of us, our good intentions or our genuine nature.

But John was now doing a different kind of baptizing, not a do-it-yourself washing away uncleanness from outside but washing away uncleanness that is inside, a washing that must be done for you.

And so John points not toward self but away from self as he points away from himself.

JOHN SAW HIMSELF AS A WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

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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?" 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."

When hiking or climbing in the mountains, if you look up
to see the peak you are headed to,
often what you see is actually a false peak.

It is only when you get there that you can see
that there is a higher peak up ahead.

And sometimes you have to go down & back up to get there.

This can be disappointing unless you know to expect it.

John is saying "I am not the peak." Like Elijah before him,
he is a voice, a signboard, pointing, "the peak is that way."

John certainly stood out. Made people ask, "Who is this guy?"

His dress reminded people of Elijah,

last seen going up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

and expected to come again before Messiah's reign.

As a prophet out in wilderness he reminded people of Moses
who said God would raise up a prophet like him.

The wilderness was a fitting place for a character like John.

who had given up all the refinements of civilization
living with only the most crude and raw food and clothing.

Later believers sought to imitate his lifestyle,

thinking that they key to holiness and inner purity

was giving up everything for the sake of God.

But when asked about himself, John didn't point to this.

Instead, v. 20 says twice, he confessed.

He confessed in 2 ways we confess.

First, in way we confess our sins, he spoke of his unworthiness.

He was not Elijah or the great prophet.

Compared to the one who was coming,

he was not even worthy to deal with his shoes,

which was the job of the lowliest servant.

So he did not, like the Pharisees, think his credentials were his own righteousness.
But he also confesses in way we confess our faith.
He affirms the truth about God.
As v.6 says, he was sent by God, was God's spokesman, and that is no small or worthless thing.
despite his humility, he is not down on himself.
v. 6 also emphasizes that his name was John, which means "God is gracious." Name speaks for itself.
When asked what he has to say about himself, he refuses to say anything about himself but what he has to say is about Jesus: God is gracious.
This is also the answer we can give if our Christian way of life causes others to ask questions and when we stand before the final judgment.
What we have to say for ourselves is not about any good we have done or goodness in us, and it is not about anything we have given up for God it is simply: go straight to Jesus. God is gracious.

JESUS IS SEEN AS THE LIGHT OF GOD HIMSELF

²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

Some people like to wear T shirts with arrow pointing to side that say I'm with...(fill in the blank)
This is what John says. You shouldn't be asking about me. You should be asking about the one who is with you that you don't know or even notice.
John is pointing to the light but Jesus is the light of the world.
As first verses of this chapter say,
he is the one who gives life & makes us God's children.
John is the voice but Jesus is the word of God made flesh.
God gave his law through Moses
but God's grace and truth come through Jesus.
John baptizes with water for repentance
but Jesus is the one who washes away sin by his blood and gives in its place the Holy Spirit.
John is not worthy to stoop down & untie Jesus' shoes.
Jesus stoops so low as to untie our sins from us
and so powerful he can carry them all away on his cross.

He is wise enough to know exactly what we need
and the best way and time to help us.

He is holy enough to open the way to heaven.
and He is loving enough to do this all for free.

So, who do I think I am? I am who God says I am.

And God makes me his own child by grace.

This is why I act as who I believe I am by faith.

Despite our unworthiness, we believe we are God's voices
to point to Jesus who may not be recognized among us.

When one is baptized here we say that is God at work
and Jesus is there giving his Holy Spirit.

When the words of absolution are spoken here
we say that is Jesus talking to us. It is certainly true.

When we receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion
we say this is Jesus who is giving us his body & blood
because that is what he himself says.

Who do I think I am? I am righteous,
not because of anything I have done

but because of what Jesus has done for me.

I am holy, not because of anything I have given up
but because Jesus has taken away my sins.

I am God's witness pointing to Jesus as the light of the world
because God is gracious to me.

PHARISEES SAW THEMSELVES AS GOD'S GUARDIANS

They had to question John because they had to make sure
everything was done right.

We are not God's guardians because he is ours.

JOHN SAW HIMSELF AS A WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

Although he stood out, he was simply a sign
pointing to the greater one they did not yet see.

JESUS IS SEEN AS THE LIGHT OF GOD HIMSELF

Jesus is the one we need to recognize
as the source of our salvation.

Jesus is the one whose claim on us gives us our identity.

Jesus is the one we want others to see when they look at us.

Jesus is the one God looks at when we are identified
as we enter into heaven.