

## The Testimony of John 3 Advent B

On this past Thanksgiving Day a few Trinity members and a few shelter guests gave their testimony of thanks. It was a blessing to hear people share like that. We don't often ask for spontaneous testimonies. They gave of their free will, sharing of what God had stirred up in their hearts.

Sharing a faith story is courageous. Consider John the Baptist when he was asked about his person, his purpose and his profession. He simply said, "I am a voice crying in the wilderness," then he quoted Isaiah as to his purpose, "Make straight the way of the Lord," and as to his profession, "I baptize with water."

The gospel says of John the Baptist simply that he "came as a witness to testify to the light." In so doing John's testimony might lead others to believe in the light. The Baptist gives us a simple recipe for sharing our Christian faith. Be a witness to the light, tell others only what you understand of the light, and step aside so the light can "shine."

Witness, tell and let your light shine. Those three acts of faith are possible to achieve in our daily lives. Every day each of us could be called upon to bear witness truthfully to a person of how the Gospel works in our lives. John's gospel writes elsewhere:

*"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* **John 3:21**

To be a witness to our beliefs requires a willingness to go public. We tell what we know. Then we let our faith story stand on its own. It can be difficult if a hard question is asked. Going public is also difficult if we are of a quiet nature. A few weeks ago I heard some of our adult members comment that they don't know what to say to outsiders about our church's faith or how to invite them to church. Remember that a testimony or faith story is a personal experience. People will receive you simply because it is your faith. Telling outsiders what you as a Christian believe is a witness that *all* of us can share. Then, if the person is open, you can share what you believe as an Episcopalian.

This can be uncomfortable when we are not ready to give an answer to those who are curious or some who may have a religious agenda. Whether it is those who knock at your door, that have a different testimony, or a friend, or those that have a greater knowledge of the Bible than you and I, just remember to simply witness, tell your story and let your light shine. It will not be your words alone that people hear but *the One in you* that bears witness to the truth. Again John's gospel writes:

“Jesus answered (Pilate), “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” John 18:37

In preparing me to bear witness in court to the theft of the downspouts on this building a few months ago the judge asked me simply to state my name, the property location and answer questions as to what happened. This was simple. When the prosecutor asked the reason the church decided to purchase copper downspouts that were expensive, I could only come up with one answer – it was a historical building and copper looked good. I was not comfortable with the question. I felt there was a hidden agenda. In retrospect I might have asked, “How relevant is this question?” What did it matter how a house of worship was decorated? For the purpose of this message what mattered is that I provided the best answer I could at the time and then I had to live with it.

Faced with a difficult situation we can rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances.

In the Collect of the Day, we pray, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us.”

St. Paul reminds us, “The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do this.”

Sometimes we are sent to bring good news to people who have fallen on hard times. Our Lord Jesus quoted a portion of our first lesson to announce His witness, His message and how God had shown His favor. The spirit anointed Him to bring the gospel, to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the spiritually captive and release to prisoners. He stopped short of reading the rest of this lesson during his first sermon. The reason: it was not His purpose to judge on His first trip to earth. Neither is it ours to judge – we carry out now what He started. The psalmist encourages our personal testimony in sharing the good news,

Those who sowed with tears \*  
will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, \*  
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

How difficult it is to share joyful news with someone you care about when they act like they don't want to hear it. I have a daughter who finds the holidays to be so depressing and uncomfortable – but she has not shared why. Perhaps some of you find yourselves trying to understand when your loved ones feel this way as I try to. At this time of year churches will hold special services for those who find that the holidays hurt more than help.

There is a word of good news we can share with these who are beloved of God. It need not be eloquent or religious but simply a sharing of our faith story and what it

means to be a Christian. Thank you for sharing your sacred stories with me. They are holy ground! Everyone needs a word of encouragement, of good news, and a witness of God's love. Do you know someone that needs a good word this Christmas? Will you pray with me and ask God to give us courage and a loving heart to bring such a word of good news? Let us pray, Thank you for the witness of your people, O Lord. From the earliest days until now you have not left yourself without a sign that you are with us. May each of us receive the gift of a faith story this Christmas and share a word of good news with someone. Amen.