

Advent B-3, 2008

John 1: 6-8; 19-28

Dec. 14, 2008

Title: Witness

Listen to these paired contrasts:

30,000 will be laid off from Bank of America

Oh God our light and our life

More dead in Zimbabwe from cholera

There was a man sent from God he came to witness to testify to the light

A Senate seat for sale?

Christ be our Light

The Big Three Auto Companies Seeking Bailout

Light dawns on a weary world

A broken probation system is exposed

I want to walk as a child of the light

Unemployment the highest in 30 years

Shine Jesus Shine

Stress illnesses on the rise

Praise the One who breaks the darkness

On Thursday--darkness at midday and the heavens filled with thunder
and lightning

Jesus Christ is the bright morning star!

Gloomy News just piles up.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world

The way things are beside the Advent of Christ.

We Christians are not to shrug our shoulders at the way things are. We
are not called to settle for the givens. We people of Jesus are not to

whittle down our vision and put Vaseline on our glasses. We are not to let the settling dust of boredom capture our lives.

Advent comes along to shake up our arm chair complacency and arouse us from dullness. And there is plenty to dull us. Take the proposed Detroit bailout. Let these companies go under and the tidal wave of lost jobs will burst into our living room. But on the other hand if these companies are bailed out, then how long will the line be of businesses asking for aid. When will Uncle Sam turn Grinch green? And what will happen when these blank checks must be accounted for?

Into this kind of nail biting anxiety comes John the Baptist declaring, “I don’t have a bailout plan.”

“Are you the one?” they ask repeatedly. John points away from himself. He points to Jesus. What we know of John in the 4th Gospel is very, very little.

Nothing about where he was born, not a thing said about where he lived or worked, just this-- he was sent from God, he came to witness to light and bring people to believe in Jesus. One singular detail---a witness to the light, of whom he professes,

“Among you stands one whom you do not know...I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

To witness is a deeply spiritual matter. It comes from within, from the heart. The most inauthentic testimony is that which is contrived...that which is rote and required. Motivation to speak about the light comes as you are grasped by that light—it’s a compulsion that shapes who you are.

In that sense each of us is invited to discern the path of the light on our paths...to find our way of witnessing to the one in the sandals.

John grabbed by the person and impact of Jesus talks about his sandals. When you encounter the living God what else are you to do? You rearrange your life. You bow down and ask forgiveness.

You open your wallet. You open your heart. You talk about sandals. You give your testimony

This week our Monday movie viewers saw *The Visitor*. It's about a depressed widower who is just going through life. His life reeks of bitterness. His testimony is bankrupt. But he encounters a young foreign couple who transform his life. Encouraged to play the congo drums, this man emerges as renewed and free. His testimony is now given through the rhythm of congo, becoming a metaphor for the visit of light to him.

You see one of the things about the one in sandals, is that his light never gives up. The light of Jesus shines on us –You don't have to be as you are. Sometimes his light shines under the closed door of our heart and sometimes it illumines all we are.

He moves among people and therefore we are not trapped in our histories or our fears. We can be set on a new course. We can be born again and again and again.

To the woman on whom Jesus shined the light of forgiveness as he saved her from being stoned to death, Jesus said, "Go your way and from now on do not sin again."

To the fishermen he met on the banks of the Sea of Galilee he said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

To the ruler who sought Jesus' counsel, he said, "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me." (from *The Christian Century*, 12/16/08)

The Light moving people from hardness of heart, from destructive patterns, from assuming they had nothing to offer-- The pages of scripture give little details about these people, save that they encountered the living light, Jesus.

Is it any different for you and me? That we are here to make our witness. And that each of us can do that. That somehow we are fully living when our whole lives are the shape of a finger pointing to Jesus.

So it is with our children when they decide to reach out at school to someone new and awkward. Their lives become a witness to the light that warms.

So it is when you step forward to be trained as a Stephen Minister and enter into someone else's pain. This is your witness walking with someone toward the good light of healing and hope

Finger through our congregational strategic plan and see there some far reaching witness. Some of what is described as our future is funny and laughable. How will we do this ...save being guided by the light? After an extensive study this year our leadership believes that our outreach ministry would benefit from a paid coordinator. We have no way of funding this; it's not even in our budget. But imagine the witness to Jesus made

The possibilities of which

we have not yet imagined.

Imagine the burgeoning senior adult community in North Raleigh becoming a force for mentoring children/youth...A witness to the Light-- Christ.

Constitutive to who we are is to point to the Light.

His light is shining in the hospital, beaming in the board room, glowing in the class room, radiating at the check out counter, in the midst of uncertainty shining brightly on a darkened stage.

John the Baptist isn't the only one who can say "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals"--each of our lives can reveal Jesus. Each of us has a witness to make, a congo to play, a life that doesn't have to be as you are.

Shine, Jesus, Shine!

