

Advent 3, December 17, 2023
Text: John 1:6-8, 19-28
Theme: What Do You Expect?

John the Baptist came to witness. That word "witness" is used dozens of times in the Gospel according to John because it is a really important concept. It is the whole reason John wrote his Gospel. A witness is not the main actor. Jesus is always the main actor. A witness is someone who watched from the wings and reports what he has seen. In John 3:30, John the Baptist correctly proclaims of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The role of the witness is to point to what he has witnessed for others to see.

That does not mean that others are going to necessarily like what the witness shows them. John the Baptist was a completely faithful witness, and he was beheaded for his excellence. Nevertheless, he was faithful in his calling. In the courtroom, when you are called to witness what you saw, the other side of the argument is not going to root for you. Look at the news media and hear all the name-calling, demeaning and various attacks on people's character just because they don't like the testimony of a witness! People are ridiculous when a witness says something that they do not want to hear. They attack. But that is not our concern. Our calling is to witness to the truth that Jesus teaches us.

What is our purpose as Trinity Lutheran Church? Our purpose is to equip people to proclaim the truth to the world. It is not to conform to the world and make everyone comfortable and happy. It is not to make sure that our savings accounts and investments are safe and intact at the expense of doing the work God has given us right here and now. It is not to be a religious club shut off from the community lest we be polluted or our precious space be sullied. Our purpose is to use every inch of our space, every dime in our coffers and every moment of our day to proclaim the love of Christ to a dying and hurting world. That has some implications.

I have no problem asking you to give more to fund this important ministry and when we talk about funding this ministry, we are talking about keeping this building heated and lit and paying the salaries of the ministry staff whose primary function is to equip you to witness. I have no problem asking you for more time to do this important ministry. Don't think of what you do as volunteering. You volunteer at your kid's school and at the Outreach House. What you do here is service to God and service to God is your first responsibility. Don't expect me to be understanding when you tell me that you can't serve on a committee because you're too busy. I will say to you, "good thing Jesus wasn't too busy when He hung on the cross for your sins." What I am calling you to do is nothing

other than what God calls you to do: be His witness in this world. This is not a side gig that you volunteer for when you have time. This is the most important thing you will do in this life because you are called to be John the Baptist for someone in your sphere of influence.

John the Baptist was attacked by the religious leaders in our Gospel for today and later, you know, he will be imprisoned and beheaded. All of that was because he was willing to speak the truth to a world that liked to conform the truth to whatever pleased them. Remember when Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Truth was whatever they defined as truth. The Romans cared nothing for the truth of the Jews and the Jews cared nothing for the truth of Jesus and so it goes today. Truth is still viewed as an opinion at best and very little credence is given to anything that is truly true. Thus, very little credence is given to the Church or the Church's ministers who are the proclaimers of God's truth to this earth.

Some of that is because we cannot prove the truth. The fact of the matter is that we believe God's truth by faith. We cannot empirically prove that Jesus was the Messiah. There is no math equation or scientific test that will prove anything. All we can do is profess what we have learned from the Scriptures. We profess it by faith and faith is not quantifiable. In order to remain steadfast and

strong in our profession of truth, we feed our faith. The Church in this nation is suffering today not because Satan has become stronger but because the believers have become weak. When believers are in worship every week receiving the Word of God and the body and blood of Christ, their faith is powerful and their profession of the truth is deafening. When believers get lazy, our profession of the truth gets weak and we begin to accept the various opinions of the world around us as truth. Truth becomes whatever the majority *feels* is true.

Today we are one week from Christmas. Now is the time for us to be John the Baptist: to invite and encourage every believer to come to worship to renew and strengthen their faith. There is no time like the Christmas season to enliven faith with worship and if faith is enlivened, truth will be proclaimed. That's just the way it works. Like John the Baptist, we are all the forerunners of Christ for someone. Every one of us was introduced to Jesus Christ by a John the Baptist in our lives. We heard the Word and it created faith in us to believe. We are not here because of our vast intellects or amazing theological skills. We are here because the Holy Spirit worked through a John the Baptist in our lives and created faith in us and now our faith is hungry, so we came here to eat and feed our faith.

Some believers have drifted away from us. They have gotten busy, gotten lazy, become distracted and forgotten where their faith is fed. They feel empty and lost because nothing they are doing is filling that God-sized hole in their lives and no matter what they pursue, nothing quite fits. They may put on a good show of happiness but without God in their daily lives, they are not at peace. They are not full of joy and they are not content.

Be John the Baptist for them. Witness what you have seen. Tell them. Invite them. Encourage them. Take the time this week to find at least one person to invite to come with you to Christmas services next Sunday or Monday. Lead them to where their faith can be fed and they will begin to abandon the sinful wisdom of this world, and as their faith grows stronger, they too will become proclaimers of the truth and they will become John the Baptist for someone else.