

+ In Nomine Jesu +

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Date: December 17, 2023

Liturgical Date: Advent 3B

Title: John sent from God

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. God himself sends the man. He came as a witness, for he must speak and proclaim what he has been given to see and know - to bear witness concerning the light - the light of men, the life, life in him, life in the Word - that all might believe through him, for such is God's good and gracious will, that all would believe and live. He was not the light, but came to bear witness concerning the light. John was just a man, but he testifies about the Word made flesh.

God had sent men before. From the burning bush, the Lord called to Moses, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." God sent a man, and a glorious work of God followed. The people were brought out of slavery to Pharaoh to worship God on his holy mountain.

Elijah was sent even outside of Israel, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." The word of the Lord sends Elijah to a woman starving up to the point of death. But by God's grace, the woman is fed in the midst of a famine. The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty. Thus says the Lord. And it happened in that same way, according to the word of the Lord. God sends a man with a word. Despair is cast away, and hope is confirmed.

And to the darkest, most ungodly heathen, God sent a man. "Arise, [Jonah, son of Amittai], go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." And, miracle of miracles, the people of Nineveh believed God. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish. God sends men to preach repentance, that all would come to the knowledge of the truth.

And most certainly God sent men to his own people. "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me." The Lord God sent Ezekiel, full of the Spirit, to Israel in exile. No matter how rebellious, no matter how many transgressions, no matter how impudent or stubborn the people were, God would not leave them in exile. Oh and how they were a rebellious house. Yet the Lord says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses,... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." The rebellious would walk in God's commands through the working of the Spirit.

John was not the first man sent from God. John, like the others, is sent with a specific task. John's work is to be a witness. The things that he sees and knows he must speak and

proclaim - as truth. Indeed, the things that John is given to see and know are from God. John must bear witness concerning the light. John must bear witness concerning the Word. In the Word is life for all men. John's witness and proclamation testifies that life for all men is now here.

This is the testimony of John. John is sent by God. John is faithful to the sending. John witnesses to the light. John's witness is so veracious that it attracts the Jews from Jerusalem. They need to know what John is doing out by the Jordan. John's preaching is so significant and weighty, they have to find out. Some things that John is doing are not the things men do on their own. John is baptizing. John is speaking of the light that comes from heaven. This light, the light of life, comes from heaven into the world covered in darkness and the shadow of death.

Who would be doing or saying such things which are so glorious they could only be sourced from God? The priests and Levites are sent from Jerusalem to inquire of the man sent by God. But they don't know about that last part, about John sent from God, at least not yet. The priests and Levites have to ask. Who are you?

John knows the one he is testifying about. That one is greater than John. John is not him. John is not the light. John is not the one who will bring life to men. But John has been speaking so much about the one who does bring life, that John has to separate his own person from the light. What sort of glorious words must John have been speaking - from God - that the priests, Levites, and all of the Jews would hear John and wonder... who could he be???

John is not the light, so he says the same. John clearly confesses, "I am not the Christ." These glorious words that you have been hearing from me, that God is coming in the flesh, that captives would be set free, that those who are in darkness are having the light shine on them, that for those sitting in death life is here - oh those words are glorious and those words are from God himself to you, but I'm not the one doing those things. I am not the Christ.

But John is somebody. What then? Elijah? There has to be a kingdom from God coming. We are in darkness, ignorant of God. We live in death's domain. We are slaves to sin. But, John, the things to which you are witnessing are going to overthrow all of those - darkness, death, sin will be conquered by the one that you have seen and are bearing witness. You must be Elijah bringing the reign of God? No? The prophet? He will speak to us from God. John, what you are speaking of does not seem to have its source in man, so are you the prophet? No, not the prophet? We need an answer. What are you saying about yourself?

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. With authority from God, John ascribes the words of Isaiah to himself - the words of the seer who was also sent by God to a people who would hear but not understand and see but not perceive, to preach until the cities were laid to waste, without inhabitant, desolate and burned, until only a holy seed remained. But Isaiah is not all gloom and doom.

These words of the seer are full of hope. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." John is the one crying out in the wilderness. This witness prepares the way of the Lord doing the thing that God

sent him to do. John preaches and proclaims that the light is coming. John's preaching does what he is saying that he is doing. The Lord is coming. Turn from your sins. The Lord will relent of his fierce anger. Ears hear this word. Water washes away sins. Hearts that are entrapped in sin repent when sins are called out. Consciences that mourn over sin are comforted.

John reveals who he is, and even more, who sent him. God sends a man into the wilderness, into darkness, into a rebellious nation to proclaim that the Lord is coming. God does not desire that men remain in their wickedness and evil deeds. God does not desire that anyone would die or even that they would grow fearful in the darkness of death. God sends a man so that all who hear will know that God's man is among them.

But they still have questions for John. John has come as the witness, but he is questioned by the people that he is witnessing to. Priests, Levites, Jews from Jerusalem, now the Pharisees. So you are not the Christ. You are the one preparing the way of the Lord. But what about this baptism? Why are you doing that? Only God would sprinkle clean water on a person and cleanse them from all uncleanness. Only God would give a new heart. How, why is John baptizing?

John, as he always does, points to the light. I baptize with water. Men come to me, repent of their sins, and their sins are forgiven them. And while this baptism has been attracting people truly desiring forgiveness as well as people who ask a lot of questions, this baptism isn't the big thing, just as I'm not the big thing, says John. The big thing is right here in your midst.

"But among you stands one you do not know." The Pharisees have their laws and their rules. They outwardly keep all of the ceremonial law. They know the law. They know who should be baptizing and who shouldn't be baptizing. The Pharisees do not know the one in their midst. They do not know the Christ. John is the witness. John will make known the one in their midst, the Christ that they are asking about.

The one in their midst is the light, so John testifies concerning the light. He is coming after me. The Christ is coming and in your midst. So pay attention and be ready. I am preaching. I am baptizing. But he is coming after me and he will do so much more than preaching and baptizing. He will offer himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He will rescue men from death by his own death. All of my preaching and baptizing would be nothing if the Christ had not come, but now that the Christ is coming after me, you will find your life, your eternal life with God, you will find your life in him, not me.

John witnesses just as God had sent him to do. John is faithful in his witnessing. John is decreasing. Christ is increasing. John does well in his calling from God, but even John must acknowledge that he is not worthy to untie the sandals of Christ. John is faithful in his God-given duty. John elevates the Christ and points others forward to the life that Christ brings for all people. Let us also be mindful to be faithful in our own God-given vocations while always and only looking at Christ for eternal life.

God sends John to bear witness. The light is here. The one coming after John is here. God sends the word. The glorious works follow. John is not worthy to untie the Christ's sandals

because the Christ's works are glorious, for the salvation of all of mankind. God sends his Christ into the world, not simply sending him, but anointing him to do the glorious work of God.

Christ comes with the Spirit of the Lord. Christ has come to give life to the world. Christ comes with the Spirit, as the Spirit gives life. The works that John was doing - preaching and baptizing - become even more life giving now that Christ has come. Christ does the glorious work of shedding his blood on the cross, the blood of the innocent lamb of God. Now the preaching puts Christ on the cross in front of hearers, and there is the assurance that God does forgive your sins. Now baptizing grants a new birth in the Holy Spirit. Now we in the church continue in Word and Sacrament. Christ forgives your sins by his blood. The Spirit gives you eternal life in baptism. By word and sacrament we persevere in the church through the darkness we see in this life.

Christ is the light that shines in darkness. He brings good news to the poor. No matter how poor or weak or broken a person is, this Christ is for you. Even if you have nothing for God, Christ's life is for you. Christ binds up the wounds of the broken hearted. You know God's law, what God commands and forbids. But then sin troubles you when you break God's law, and from sin comes death. Now you are healed. The law does not bring despair, but delight. Your sins are cast away. Death's hold on you is shattered, for life has come into the world.

The year of the Lord's favor is coming. The day of God's vengeance comes upon the ungodly. But how much more is the year of the Lord's favor upon those who place their hope in Christ. Gladness will come instead of mourning. Ashes of sadness will become garments of salvation. Death may seem to win the day today, even over the faithful. The glorious work of God is hidden now. God promises salvation and righteousness, and he who calls you is faithful. The church is brought forth as a jeweled bride. Righteousness and praise sprouts up before all the nations. The church perseveres in this hope, and much fruit comes forth. Christ brings a great reversal from all of the miseries and despairs that you see in this life. God's mercy is enduring.

Christ the anointed is greater than the men whom God has sent before him. Moses was sent to Pharaoh so that Israel would be free from slavery. Now Christ comes to proclaim liberty to those captive by sin and death. Elijah was sent so that the widow would be fed during the famine. Now Christ comes to prepare you for the eternal feast with a robe of righteousness. Jonah was sent so that Nineveh might repent. Now Christ comes to preach repentance and as the sign that God turns and relents of anger. Ezekiel was sent so that a rebellious people would come back to God. Now Christ comes to cleanse you from all of your uncleanness and put a new heart within you.

This is the testimony of John, the man sent by God to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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