



Who Are You? – Touchpoint for December 13, 2023

John 1:6-8, 19-28 (NRSVUE) The Testimony of John the Baptist

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

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for 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, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

This time of year we sing songs of comfort and joy. Yet we may be suffering in some way... a dark shadow that follows us to the light shows and Christmas programs. Christmas movies are on repeat and so is Mariah Carey’s song “All I Want for Christmas Is You” until we want to tear our tinsel out. The holidays can be a difficult time for the grieving, the financially troubled and the lonely. But we love the holidays! It can be joyous to watch our children gaze in wonder at the magic of Christmas. It appears worth it in the long run when we share mutual kindness and surprise.

What are we to do? We retell the fantastical story of the Christ child entering the world and we’re expected to put our personal suffering aside for the glitter. Don’t get me wrong. I love the season, but I loved it more when I heard the words, comfort and joy. We could use some of that!

I’m wondering if we can transform the way we experience the holidays. Can we feel all the darkness and still allow the holy light in? Can we make room for both the reality of our circumstances and cynicism, as well as comfort and joy?

Barbara Brown Taylor says in her book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, “...new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.”

The Reverend Anne Elliston from Saint Barnabas Church in Scottsdale said, “We are not to attempt to stop a person from feeling uncomfortable, but we can bring comfort.” I would also say, it is not for us to keep somebody from being unhappy, but we can bring joy.

Joy is the byproduct of gratitude.

In The Magnificat Mary sings, “My spirit rejoices ... for he has looked on me, his lowly servant.” Her circumstances were bleak. We need not be pithy with our gratitude, but instead we make space in our

circumstances for what we are grateful for. In this way, we are letting the light in. We may begin to testify to The Light as John the Baptist did. The light shines regardless of our circumstances. So, it is with joy in our unhappiness and comfort in our dis-ease. What if every bell and light reflect for us a celebration of spirit entering my real world... not to make me comfortable but to comfort me? Not to make me happy, but to experience joy?

Rather than entering the season as cynical adults, perhaps we should enter as children. I think children know the difference between Santa Claus and God better than we do. We sometimes think we are both. Maybe we should begin as a child, wondering who this God is, as though for the first time, rather than wondering who is behind the beard.

God, who are you?

Our culture spends a lot of time asking the question, 'Who am I?' We are narcissistic seekers. We think that professionals can tell us who we are. We believe the way to satisfying our egoistic question is to let our ego go on the hunt until it hears an answer that satisfies our ego.

I've come to believe that the only way to discover oneself, is to ask God, 'Who are you?' When we are born fresh from the comfort of the womb, everything is new and frightening. Perhaps that's why it's blocked from our memories. The sudden arrival into an environment unlike the previous residence must be traumatic. There was nothing but weightless warmth and now I'm being hoisted into cold awareness. We are given to our mother whose face we've never seen. She stares lovingly into our eyes, at the only distance our eyes can see. We stare back from the comfort of our swaddling clothes. Gazing into her eyes we ask, 'Who are you?' That's our first question! It's not, 'Who am I,' said like a Shakespearean actor. Then we hear her voice. The voice holds us, and we are utterly dependent on that voice for our identity. I am who she says I am. I am holds me, clothes me, feeds me and cleans up after me. Sometimes into my 20's.

The priests and the Levites from Jerusalem knew from John's lineage that he was a priest. When your father was a priest, then you are a priest. John had an intimate moment with God in which he was given his identity. It overwhelmed him, according to some Bible passages. But John was behaving oddly, and many people following him elevated his status to that of the Messiah. So, if he wasn't the Messiah or a prophet or Elijah, then he has no authority to baptize. Their question was, 'Who do you say you are? Who are you? As a priest you behave in unfamiliar ways.'

The church despises change and new things, doesn't it? It's was no different then. The question is genuine, 'Who are you?' Rather than, 'How do you fit into my world of orthodoxy?', they are asking for their superiors, 'Who do you think you are that you can baptize?' John's answer to them was, "I am nothing but one who is pointing to the light."

When we ask the question, 'Who are you, God?', we may simply get a gaze back, as the first glimpse of the mother of our creation.

I may not know who I am, but I am who God says I am. It is revealed in the years of my utter dependence. I experience comfort and Joy!

Amen.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taizé)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior.
For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore.
How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree.
You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.