

“Bear the Light”

Date: December 13, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 1:6-8; 19-28

Theme: Light

Occasion: Advent 3, Year B

The five year old nephew of the bride was chosen to be in charge of carrying the rings down the aisle. At the wedding rehearsal he was unusually unruly. He kept leaping out at people, baring his teeth at them, and chasing the flower girls. He growled and snarled as he practiced going up and down the aisle. He carried the pillow like a pistol. Finally his mother pulled him aside and demanded to know why he was behaving so badly.

“But Mom,” he explained, “I have to act fierce – I’m the Ring Bear!”

Like so many of us, that little boy misunderstood what role he was supposed to play. He thought he was called to be big, imposing, fearsome, and in charge. He thought *he* was supposed to be “the star of the show.” He thought the spotlight was on him.

In this week’s Gospel lesson, John, the author of the fourth gospel, has no trouble telling the difference between the one who “bears witness” to the light, from the one who actually IS the light. John the Baptist is “a man sent from God,” but he is still just a man.

When he is confronted and grilled by representatives of the highest religious authorities, they were quite concerned with who he might be. They wondered if he might be a new incarnation of one of Judaism’s most celebrated and anticipated figures. Who was this man of the desert?

Well, as this delegation from Jerusalem quizzes John, at first all they get is confirmation of who he is not. Before they can even mention the possibility that he might be the one they waited for, John denies it. “I am *not* the Messiah. As they try to pin down his identity, the contingent from the

Temple offers him the opportunity to claim other important roles. Is he Elijah? Is he there to usher in the day of the Lord? Is he a new Moses, a new direct mouthpiece for God's words to the world?

John doesn't want to talk about it. He doesn't want to talk about himself, that is, who or what he may or may not be. Despite his growing popularity, John refuses to let himself become the center of attention. The only identity he will claim is that of "the voice." And the voice of John is only raised to proclaim the One who is "the Word." The coming one is "The Voice" they are to listen to.

John the Baptist would have made a terrible reality star. Our 21st century celebrity culture has everybody glowing in the dark, because everyone has trained a big blazing spotlight on their own lives. We find ourselves so fascinating that every move we make is worthy of broad-casting to the world.

We "tweet" our choice of purchasing a vanilla latte, or wearing plaid socks, as though everyone in the world is interested. We YouTube ourselves singing and dancing in our living rooms, hoping our video goes viral and we become a star. We cover our Facebook wall with every thought that skitters through our minds. We Snapchat minute details of our lives, hoping to entertain our friends and gain a wider audience.

On reality TV, the obscenely rich flaunt their excess; the extremely mean flaunt their bad behavior; and horribly dysfunctional families flaunt their sad dysfunctions. Andy Warhol woefully underestimated the power of media. We no longer get "15 minutes of fame." We are "famous" in our own minds every minute of every day.

John the Baptist, though, refused to step into the spotlight. He knew that his mission from God was simply to bear witness to the light, not to

stand center stage in the spotlight. Every year, during the Advent season, we are all reminded to take up John's mission, to announce to a dark and troubled world that the light is coming.

"Decking the halls," Christmas concerts, cookie baking marathons, shopping sprees (either online or in person), and sending Christmas cards, well, these are all wonderful. But they are not the focus of Advent. They are not the source of the light.

What we are doing in our lives is not the reason for the season. What we can buy for others is not the heartbeat of our preparation and waiting. Rather, *what God is preparing to do for the world* is the glowing center of Advent.

In the words Dr. Seuss gave to the Grinch, after his conversion to the happy ways of the Whos down in Whoville: "Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas – means a little bit more."

This Advent season; this Christmas season, bear the light. Don't be the light; don't seek the spotlight. **Bear** the light, so that Jesus can shine. We don't need more of the spirit of Christmas. We need more of the Spirit of Christ.

The light of Christ has come into our world. Why? – to eliminate darkness. You and I still have dark places in our hearts, dark places which only Christ can illuminate. We need to open ourselves to the love represented by the babe of Bethlehem.

Inside each of us are dark areas, things we don't want others to see, things we ourselves may not be able or willing to look at. Allow the light of Christ to shine brightly into your heart and chase away all darkness. Allow the love of Christ to reveal the dark corners of your heart; and know that we all have them.

Allow the light of Christ to reveal any selfishness or greed, any prejudice or hatred, any anger or resentment. Let the love of Christ shine deep into your heart to expose any pride or any haughtiness, any self-righteousness or judging. Shine, Jesus, shine! Show me; show us all, the things that cast a shadow on the brilliance of your love in our lives.

And finally, we need to bear witness to the light we have found in Christ. Why – so that someday everyone in this world may walk in the light, and there will be no darkness at all. So, how do we do we do that? Well, I saw an interesting meme on Facebook which I think says it well.

“If you want to keep Christ in Christmas, then feed the hungry; clothe the naked; forgive the guilty; welcome the unwanted; care for the ill; love your enemies; and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

In other words, do the things Jesus told us to do in the gospels.

We show the love of Christ by putting the teachings of Jesus into practice. It is not enough simply to say we believe in Jesus and then ignore everything he taught his disciples. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” We need to follow his way, put his words, into practice.

Mother Theresa was fond of saying, “Jesus has no other hands, no other feet, no other voice than ours.”

Friends, in spite of the pandemic, I hope that you are still able to find ways to put your Christian faith into practice – showing kindness, helping others, caring for those who are struggling. The world does not need more empty words. The world does not need another sermon. The world needs to see the words of Jesus put into practice.

Light has come into our world, in the person of Jesus Christ. Receive the light this day, then go forth to bear witness to the light, until that day when the light of Christ fills the entire world and there is no more darkness.