



Reflection by Rev'd Tony Meek

Third Sunday of Advent
Year B
John 1:6-8, 19-28
Isaiah 61.1
17th December 2023

“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”

This was a real man; he had a mother and a father—Zechariah and Elizabeth. Yet, he was sent from God. He was a prophet.

“Who are you?” the people asked, taunting him. Who gave you the right to call us to repentance, to baptize your followers, to remind us of our sins? Who are you?

“I am a voice crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.”

They are familiar with the words of the great prophets of their tradition. But what they don't know is what he tells them next.

“I came as a witness to the light,” he announces, and then he personifies the light— *“so that all might believe through him.”*

He is talking about light not as a phenomenon or an effect, but as a person. *“I myself am not this light,”* John the humble, the profound, tells them, *“but I have come to give witness to this light.”*

And his courageous, prophetic voice continues with the surprising statement: *“I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”*

Untying the thongs of sandals was a slave's job. A slave would have to bend down to untie the sandals of feet that had walked on dusty and dirty unpaved roads. Yet John, wildly popular at that time, claiming crowds of followers, has the humility to say that he is lower than a slave compared to the one he is about to introduce to them as the Light.

Truth, humility, and self-awareness: these are marks of the prophet.

Fearlessness and courage are the most evident marks of the prophet.

We see those in John the Baptist; we hear them in his cry, and we know that they brought him to the attention of King Herod. John's courage led to his gruesome death.

Jesus of Nazareth took the words of Isaiah we heard in our first reading and made them his own. He was filled with spirit of the Lord; he was the Lord's anointed, the Christ.

He too proclaimed good news to the poor as he bound the broken-hearted. He was the Light, the evangelist tells us, and the Light cannot be put out; it flickers, but it is not extinguished.

John the Baptist was a witness to this light.

We too are asked to be witnesses to the Light.

We cannot have courage to proclaim the good news in a culture filled with the idols of wealth, weapons, and war unless we are filled and guided by God's light.

Do not despise the words of the prophets, St. Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Thessalonians.

This Advent, as always, may we be filled with their passion for justice and peace and with their courage and fearlessness as we too seek to witness to the Light.