

CAN I GET A WITNESS?
Isaiah 61:8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28
Third Sunday of Advent

Where have you seen God at work in your life? As I grew up in Danbury, the pastor of our church asked that question of our congregation every week. I often thought about that question during the week and wondered if, indeed, God was doing anything in my life. As I grew in my faith, I came to realize that Emmanuel, God with us, means that God is always present. In addition, I came to understand that often Christians fail to see God in our midst. We sometimes think that God is not near, not present, not with us. And, we tend to keep any thoughts about God to ourselves for fear that others will find fault or criticize us.

During the Season of Advent, as we prepare for the coming of the Messiah-Savior into our hearts and lives, there is the danger for our worship to become more self-focused, moving toward self-satisfaction. How beautiful the decorations. How soothing the sermons; uplifting the music; cute the children in costumes and frilly dresses.

However, the questions we ask of each Sunday worship are especially questions for the Advent Season: Is God worshipped? Is Christ proclaimed? Do we bear witness to those who wander into this family celebration puzzled and lonely?

To say that as Christians we bear witness to Christ is a far cry from saying that we are somehow "little Christs". To say that the Church is the body of Christ does not simply lessen his lordship with our service. We point to him, we serve him, and we stand entirely under his judgment. Freed from prevention and anxiety, we have a better chance of bearing witness to the authority of Christ.

The bumper sticker asks "What would Jesus do?" He would walk on water, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. The scripture reading for today suggests that the better question: "What would Jesus have us do?"

We cannot read this scripture without remembering that John the Baptist was beheaded for his faithfulness in proclaiming Jesus as Lord. In polite North American society, resistance is far more subtle. The danger is not that we will be executed but that we will be ignored. The Word made flesh becomes the word made papier-mâché, displayed on the lawn with the same charm and power of the Santas and elves and red-nosed reindeer. Given the gift that Advent celebrates, it is simply selfish to keep our good news to ourselves!

The claim that religion is entirely a private mattress, never proclaimed and seldom mentioned, is far from the convictions of John the Baptist and of John's gospel. We proclaim the message of "Come and See."

From 1921, until his death, Karl Barth kept over his desk a copy of a painting by Mathias Grünewald. The crucified Christ hangs in the center of the picture, and to one side stands John the Baptist, who Barth considers to be his model for himself and for all Christian believers. John has his hand pointing to Jesus in an almost impossible way. In an almost impossible way

we, too, keep pointing to Jesus. How will you witness to the light of the One who comes to give light in the darkness? How do you proclaim the coming of the Messiah? How will you bring the Light of Christ into the darkness of this world? What kind of witness are you? Amen.