

## Can I Get a Witness?

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

In the time that I have with you this morning I want to talk to you about being a 'witness to the light' - but before I begin listen to what William Barclay says about the *light coming into the world*:

He writes, "John says that Jesus, by his coming into the world, brought real light to everyone... His coming was like a blaze of light... It was like the coming of the dawn... A traveller tells how once in Italy he was standing on a hill overlooking the Bay of Naples... It was so dark that nothing could be seen; then all of a sudden there came a lightning flash and everything, in every detail, was lit up... and when Jesus came into this world, he came like a light in the dark (so that every man and woman might see glimpses of the Divine)... and so that every man and woman might bear witness to that same Light..."

Years ago, our former bishop, Roy Riley told a story about hanging Christmas lights one evening on a very cold and dark night... he mentioned how his hands were freezing, his back was uncomfortable, and how the lights wouldn't cooperate (as he was trying to hang them on his house - and in his front yard)...

With that, one of his neighbors (who happened to be Muslim) came out and asked, "*Why do you hang those lights outside every year?... I've always wondered about their meaning... And aren't you freezing?*"...

And as the pain of the *cold winters' night* started to run through his fingers – he thought to himself, "*That's a good question... why am I out here?*"...

But then pausing for a moment and remembering the goodness of God in his life, he finally said with conviction, "*Because I am a witness to the light of Jesus Christ in this world*"... I am a witness...

You know, when I was in seminary I spent one year as a student in an all-black Lutheran Church on the southside of Chicago – Reformation Lutheran Church... and what was always very moving to hear were the testimonials of the black preachers who would pass through that church...

And some of these preachers would tell stories of how Jesus saw them through trials and temptations... how the Lord gave them strength to "*keep on keeping on*"... they would share testimonials of lives changed – hope restored – sobriety returned – all done with conviction (and with power)... why?... because these were

men and women who saw the Light of God in their lives (not because they were special – and not because they were black) but because they believed in the words of Jesus... they believed in the Light of God and not what the world was telling them... and they stood up to be a witness (to that Light) with courage and conviction...

And after every preacher gave his or her testimonial (they would throw it back to the listener in the pews) – and ask a very important question we might ask ourselves this morning... they'd always ask, "can I get a witness?"... In other words, have you too experienced that grace, mercy, and power of Jesus Christ in your own life? – and if so – why not stand up and tell the world?... why not speak up (and bear witness to the Light)?...

Can I get a witness?

So, let me start with a question for your own reflection - what does your life tell others about what you believe?... what do the words that you speak and the actions that you take (bear witness to?)... what does your demeanor (and how you carry yourself) show the world?... how do those who see you and know you (describe you)?... how do those who see you (and don't know you) describe you?... and what is your witness in the world that needs hope (now more than ever)?...

Where was your Light – when the darkness rolled in?...

Can I get a witness?...

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent we look to one who's life bore witness to God's *long-promised* Messiah... In fact, it tells us in our lesson this morning from John's Gospel, "*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John... He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him... He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light*"...

Now if you know this Advent story (then you also know that the man that we are talking about this morning is John the Baptist)... John was Jesus' cousin (and he was born to his very elderly parents - a priest named Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth) long after they had given up hope of having any children of their own...

In fact, his parents were told of this seemingly impossible birth before it took place (by the angel Gabriel)... and you would think that a man of faith (like Zechariah) would be overjoyed by this announcement of finally having a child of their own (and eager to see God's plan unfold in his life)... but listen to how Zechariah

responds to the news in Luke 1:8... it says, *“And Zechariah said to the angel, “How can this be? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”... and needless to say, Zechariah’s words bore witness – to his doubts...*

And because of his doubts the angel responds, *“I am Gabriel, And I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news... But now you will be silent and unable to speak until the day this comes to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”...*

In other words, it’s Zechariah’s doubts in what the Lord can do (that not only take away his voice – but it also prevented him from being a witness to the Light... and his voice would not return until he held his son (in his arms)...

And the Bible tells us that this son was not the Light (but he came to testify to the Light – as a witness)... and just as Zechariah’s testimony of doubt led to him to a period of involuntary silence – where he could no longer bear witness... (John’s testimony – which God had also given him to bear) led to something entirely different and wonderful... (because with his willingness to believe in the Lord’s promises) he used his words – his voice – and his courage - to lead others to Jesus... and as a witness to the Light (John also led people - to find salvation)... the one thing that pleases God like no other...

Perhaps this is why Jesus once said in Matthew 11:11, *“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater- than John the Baptist.”... Why?... because John was the first witness to the Light of the World (and it was through this witness that the world found the salvation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ)... (like one man lighting the candle of others until everyone has that same light for themselves – and all darkness scatters)...*

So let me ask you - what does your life bear witness to?... and are you showing the world the light that lives within you?... What is your witness in these darkened days?...

Do you remember what Jesus once said?... he said to us in Matthew 5:15, *“No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl (because it would be extinguished)... Instead they put it on it a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”... in other words, be a witness to the Light... and whatever you do (don’t hide that light away)... especially not today...*

Can I get a witness?...

Let me close with a story that, in his book **God Came Near**, Max Lucado tells a story about four candles that didn't want to leave their storage closet during a power outage (a time when they were needed the most)... when the owner went to find them, and light them so that he could see in the dark, the candles began to talk... and they didn't want to leave their place of comfort...

One candle said he needed more time (before he would feel ready to let his light shine) – another candle said she was too busy – another said he wasn't qualified to shine – and still another one said that giving light wasn't her gift (she preferred to sing, "This Little Light of Mine"...

And so finally, the man gave up trying to light the candles (and he put them back in storage)...

The wife then asked, "Where did you even get such useless candles"...

And the man said, "At the little church down the street that closed"...

You know, when you look at the world today can any one of us deny that there is a lot of darkness all around us?... there are refugees in Syria living in tents in very cold temperatures... millions and millions of people affected by illness – loss – job loss – divorce – war – grief – addiction – and the list goes on and on... and even today with this pandemic (there are so many people who have lost hope) – perhaps even hope for living...

And if we don't bear witness to the Light today – who will?...

Can I get a witness?...

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!**