

Advent 3 - Year B

BAS: Collect page 270
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126 OR Canticle 18
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
St. John 1:6-8, 19-28 *

St. Mark's, Halifax - Dec. 14, 2014 - 10:00am

“Compasses -Witnesses”

By now most children have written and mailed in their *Letter to Santa Claus*. Cards have been mailed, and some people add a brief note or include a Christmas Letter outlining some of the family activities over the past year.

Whenever people apply for a job or entrance into a University, they fill out an **application form** or *Resume* telling who they are. They give their family histories. Their educational background, hobbies, interests and so on. The prospective employer or University Registrar need to know **WHO** these applicants are. Sometimes we meet new people at work, at Church or some other gathering, and after a bit of conversation, we get to know something about each other.

In most settings, the important thing about people is **who they are**. SO - during this Advent Season, have we given any thought about our **Christian resume - about who we are and what we are about?**

Last Sunday we were introduced to a strange character named **John the Baptist** and we learned something about him - he lived in the wilderness, he was a preacher, he was quite charismatic and people were attracted to him, he baptized people as a sign of repentance, he dressed funny and ate strange food. We meet him again this Sunday, but today's Gospel tells us more about who **John is not**. He was not the 'Light', nor the Christ. He was not Elijah, nor was he the "prophet".

What lesson can we take home today? Most people are pre-occupied today with questions about identity and ego - we call this the **me** generation - different individuals & groups today are trying to establish who they are. Christians, on the other hand, must first know **who we are not** - then we can discover who we are.

1. We are **not** the 'Light' of the world - we don't have the answers to all of life's problems and mysteries. Whenever we begin to think we do, whenever we think we know exactly how other people ought to think and act - then our faith becomes arrogant and oppressive. Christ is the only Light of the world - we are only called to be reflections of Him. Therefore, we need always to humbly hope and pray that we may reflect His light. When we claim to be the light - then we cut ourselves off from the Source of that light.

2. We are **not** better or more holy than others. Throughout the Centuries Christians have been **loving, kind, forgiving & obedient**. But we have also been **stubborn, rebellious, mean-spirited and divisive**. Our history as God's people is a **mixed story** of faith and faithlessness

- grace & hardness of heart. And we don't have the complete market on good works. Many non-Christians are as good - if not better - than us.

3. If we know who **we are not** - then, **“who are we?”** Our Gospel says: *“John was not the Light” - “but came to bear witness to the Light”*. If the world is looking on you and me for light - or, if it is depending on your goodness and mine for its salvation - then the world is lost. But the Good News is that there is One who is the Light, and whose faithfulness never fails or ends - and that is Jesus the Christ. The world must find Him if it is to be saved. Therefore, we are those who bear witness to the Light - **we bear witness to Jesus.**

As Christians we all live within the sphere of influence - that is - we all touch the life of someone else. As witnesses to the Light, we want to make a positive difference to our world by pointing others to the answers we have found in Jesus. John is our example on the 3rd Sunday of Advent. He was the *“voice crying in the wilderness”* - but he wasn't crying out just anything - His message was clear and to the point. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, he declared that his mission was to *“make straight the way of the Lord”*. He was to turn the consciousness of the people God-ward - to ready the minds of the people for a new thing which was about to happen - to herald the good news of God's entry into the world - he came to speak God's message. As the Church - the baptized people of God - our mission is no different. We are to be the moral conscience of the nation that seems to have lost its morality - its concern for profits over people - the feeding of the poor - the nurture of children, the homeless and the sick, We are to follow the One who came to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah - Jesus, the true Light who came to *“..bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to...comfort all who mourn; ...to give them garlands instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit...”* Our task too is to declare the word of the Lord and to authenticate that word by living lives of integrity.

The story is told of a father who gave his son a compass for Christmas. The compass would often be seen throughout the house amid the rest of the family clutter. Nothing ever remained in the same place for very long in their home, but every time the son noticed the compass - the needle was always pointing in the same direction. That is the important thing about our Christian witness - we should always be pointing in the same direction - to Jesus, the Light of the world..

So who are we?

As Christians we are “compasses” - pointing away from ourselves to the power of the Light of Christ - we are mirrors reflecting His light.

Fr James Purchase