

JOHN THE BAPTIST IS YOU AND ME

For the second week in a row we meet John the Baptist. Last week John was this strange-looking figure clothed in camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, crying out in the wilderness "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." This week John is portrayed as a man sent by God, as a witness to the light that is coming into the world.

What does John the Baptist have to say to us in the 21st century? And I think the simplest answer to that question is to presume that anything said about John is also to be said about us, about you and me.

John's Gospel says, (and by the way the Gospel of John is by a different John, not John the Baptist – there are a number of Johns in the New Testament and it's easy to confuse them) John's Gospel says "There was a man sent from God ..."

So am I, and so are you, sent from God. By virtue of our baptism. Every day of my life I'm sent into that day to live it out as one sent from God on a mission, sent from God as a member of Christ's body, one of Christ's arms or ears or feet or mouth. Baptism is not joining a comfortable little club that's supposed to insure us a safe passage into heaven when we die. You and I are sent from God as ambassadors for Christ, today.

I found myself thinking about what it means to be an ambassador for Christ, walking along with the crowds in the stores yesterday, amidst the cosmic hysteria that is Christmas shopping. And I wondered, can I make a difference to one person here, with a smile, a kind word, a helping hand? How can I be an ambassador for Christ, sent from God, right here and now, where God has sent me? It's not easy, but it's our calling. We are "sent from God."

Secondly, the Gospel also says John was "a witness to testify to the light." So am I, and so are you. Not just a spectator, but a witness. I think it was the comedian Flip Wilson who when asked about his religion said he was a "Jehovah's Bystander." "They asked me to be a Jehovah's Witness," he said, "but I didn't want to get involved." Not so, with us, right?

To witness in the eyes of the law is simply to see something happen. It's passive. As a Christian to witness to Jesus means to get involved, to express in words and actions that we've been moved by our encounter with Christ, that the presence of Christ in our lives makes a difference. Like the moon reflecting the sun, my life and my gifts may only be pale reflections of the gifts and the glory and the love of Jesus. But they are reflections.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If someone wants to know what Jesus is like, I hope they can just look at you, or me -- right? If by any word or action of ours you or I succeed in showing even a glimpse of God to another person, that success will really be the light of Christ working through us.

We can witness right here at St. Mary's in many ways – through Faith in Action helping immigrants, the hungry, the homeless – the many needy in our community and beyond. Those whom Jesus loved. We can witness by being a welcoming presence. Forgiving someone. Is there someone you need to forgive? We can be witnesses testifying to the light of Christ, as was John the Baptist.

So I think the real lesson of John the Baptist is that he is our model – not in clothing and diet perhaps, but in actions. Everything said about John can also be said about us – we're sent from God as ambassadors and witnesses to prepare for Christ, to testify to the light of Christ, now, right here and now, where we are, even in the midst of the holiday frenzy. We're not talking about ancient biblical history here, the little town of Bethlehem, in a long ago time. We're talking about today. We're preparing for Christ to be with us, here in San Francisco, today.

There was a person sent from God, whose name was John, or Lin, or David, or Alice, or Joe, or Pat. We are here now, as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him – and through us. What here is said of John must also be said of us.