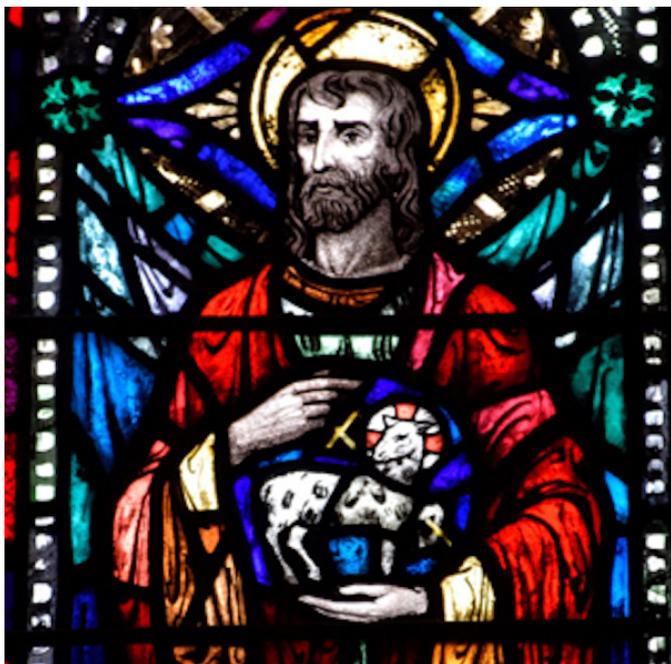


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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TO THE LIGHT

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached on the 3rd Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11 | PSALM 126

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24 | JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

In these days of growing darkness, we Christians must be like John and testify to the light. The early church's favorite name for John was not "the Baptist", it was "the Forerunner". As we have just heard, John knows who he is, what he is about. He is not just about baptizing. He is a voice. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord!'" He does not need to be anyone else.

Think of how he grew up. Consider the things he heard and knew about Aunt Mary, his mother Elizabeth, and his cousin Jesus. John was not distracted by fanciful readings of history or prophecy. God spoke to him and said: you will be the one who reminds my people that, although I have restored them before, I will restore their fortunes again. Go announce a new movement of God, a new return from exile, a rebuilding the ancient ruins and raising up the former devastations, from within. John had just one job to do: to testify to the light that was coming into the world.

Shall we join him? Can we testify to the light – in our unique situation? Dark days are truly upon us. Hospitals are filling again. Deaths are rising. The poorest and often most hard working among us are out of work. Our politics, if it were possible, are getting even more crazy. Our holiday rituals are completely disrupted. Our churches are going to virtual worship again, except for Christmas Eve. We are all tired, emotionally challenged, and wondering how much real inner strength we have to persevere.

Give thanks that Christmas will be different this year. We need to be different this year. Why not begin to find new eyes to see what John was clearing away the ground for: the great mystery of the Incarnation. Start with John's "No." John said, 'No!' I am not the Messiah. No! I am not Elijah. No! I am not even the mysterious prophet who is to come like another Moses and update the law. No. I, John, am not like any of those unfinished stories from our past.

But look! My Aunt Mary will say 'Yes!' After my voice, you will hear hers. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoice in God my Savior." And it will make all the difference.

The light, like wild water that always finds its way, will pour over every boundary. That light will be conceived within her. She will bear the light of the world to term. She will feel within her the world being turned upside down, the rich and the powerful being sent away empty. She will be able, with every glance, in every word, to share with us the tender mercy of God, to understand restoration in that light.

John's 'No', and Mary's 'Yes', are two sides of the same coin. They are the Holy Spirit moving us to make our witness. We struggle to know who we are. Often this means saying no to fantasy's we have about ourselves and expectations other have about us. No one can say yes to God for us. Every Christian wake up each day with the task of being a witness to the light, bearers of the Incarnate Word.

To me, the glory and joy of our celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe, of our dear Mother – who has the custom of appearing to God's children throughout the world in their greatest time of need, in the ways that they can understand – is not that Mary is so miraculous and unique. That she is. There can be only one Queen Mother of the King and Messiah of Israel. There can be only one Queen of Heaven.

The glory and joy of our celebrations is that she crowns us with her royal calling. Her life, her example is a living gift. Through that one act of saying yes to God, she shows us how it is done, she asks us to do the same in our day, in our context. She points to the light. She reminds us to do whatever he tells us to do.

John's 'No' and Mary's 'Yes', make the joy of this season possible. Our saying no to sin, no to unrealistic fantasies about how we wish life to be, and saying yes to the goodness, the loyalty, the kindness and gentleness around us, and that especially we can bring, is the source of the joy of the days ahead.

The Third Sunday in Advent is JOY Sunday. Here are some notes from my diary.

Joy! A vaccine is on the way! Joy! Each day is growing now a little longer. Joy! A crowd in the Soup Kitchen line breaks out humming Joy to the World. Joy! Last night, outside the chapel, as prepared to celebrate our Lady, in the encroaching darkness, a broken down old man walked up to us and handed me a \$20 dollar bill. He then gestured that he wanted a flower from the arrangement prepared for the Virgin. I give it to him, and he then turns and gives it to a little girl I hadn't noticed standing just next to me. Joy! Seeing and hearing such things restores the music of God's overflowing Spirit in my heart.

“Restore us O Lord, like the water courses of the Negev.” The Negev is so dry, that when the first rains come, they flow along in a great torrent, happily and swiftly, as if running through copper, concrete or glass. The water makes its way swiftly, losing no potency or force. Sheer life.

Each of us has a job to do in the coming days. We must testify to the light. We must believe, and know, and trust that God will restore his people, just as he has restored us before.

“Restore us, O Lord, like the water courses of the Negev.” We who are so dry, so low, so confused, so surrounded by an invisible enemy and our own sin, Lord, send your Holy Spirit right through us to those around us. Make us witnesses to your light!