

John 1:6-8, 19-28

3rd Sunday in Advent

December 16, 1984

There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came for testimony to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

They used to believe that ~~his~~ world was the center. For centuries they taught in the best universities that this earth was the center of all the universe, and that the sun and the moon and the stars revolved around us. of course that is how it appears to us. I look into the sky and ever so slowly the sun moves from east to west. The rocks the hills the trees, they remain where they are, the earth solid, and all the universe ^{above,} moving.

But men with telescopes and mathematics said no, our earth is revolving racing in a circle around our sun, And our sun, it is but a star, not particularly big, just a star, a dot in our galaxy, and our galaxy, but one of many in the universe. What exists so far that we cannot see it, is more by far than all we can. ^{So now} we feel small, in a universe without a center, lost in the vastness.

I am one, like all the rest, I confessed out loud, though inside, in my secret place where no one was ever allowed I knew it was not true. Yes, I am a human being who will age, who will lose, who will die. I told them that I knew it was true, though I knew it was not. I was special, created for a special purpose. My parents, my brother and sisters, my aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, teachers, friends, they were stars in a universe that moved and rotated. One thing was at the center, remained fixed, stayed constant, me I. The dream of Joseph I knew was true of me, the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down to me. Was I not born in the special place, America, at the special time of prosperity and peace. Had not God given to me intelligence and understanding and talents. Surely he had picked me out to be the center.

Then I joined the human race. I never thought it could happen to me, I said as disappointment, pain, death made thier visits into my life. Things

like this happen to ether people, to the other guy, but not to me. And slowly, little by little I come to know that I am moving with all the rest, truly one among the many. Slowly I realize that whatever has happened to any other person on this earth, could happen to me and those I love. My child could be snatched off the street, brutalized, tortured by an insane killer. My house could be broken into and I could be killed in my sleep. A deer may jump through my windshield and through the resulting accident I could be a quadrapelagic for the remainder of my days. Cancer could ravage my body so that I would be the object of your shaking heads and pity. I am just a planet, a speck, one of the many.

But I know there is a center. He has been and will be the center at all times. Though I live for self, thought I fool myself into believing this world was created for me, in truth it is for him and by him and through him that all things exist, even me.

Long ago a man named John the Baptist pointed to this center. ^{John} ~~he~~ was not the light, we read, but he came to bear witness to the light. He came for testimony to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.

As I hear this description of John, I realize it is a description of us as well. We are not the light, we are not the center, you and I are not the point of the whole story, but we are sent by God to this world to bear witness to the light.

And how that witness is needed. The earth is no longer at the center of the universe, and people find it can happen to them these days. And when they do, when the myth of believing that they are special, protected is exploded, then so many are lost in the vastness. For them there is no meaning no purpose, nothing more than self.

Despair. Bitterness. Isolation, these are poisons that kill. Anxiety uncertainty, when a family has farmed the place for forty or fifty years and suddenly there is not enough money to pay the bankers, then the world and life itself may seem a bitter joke. And when the work has been hard and long and the work a success until just at the moment for travel and enjoyment

disabling sickness makes a visit, then our neighbors may be asking, is there no light, not right, no good. When a mother's love has watched and waited for decades and given all it can and is answered by the untimely death of her now grown child, she asks, what was it all for?

It does happen to us, and to our neighbors, and the temptation to despair is great. There is no center, our hearts cry out, no meaning, no nothing.

There was a people sent by God to live in Perkins county. They were sent to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through them. They were not the light, the center, but they came to bear witness to the light.

And the witness we bear is this. God, the creator and ~~divine~~ protector of the universe, God was wrapped in human flesh. And he took our place here, just one among themany. And what we were so sure could never happen to us, happened to him too. The suffering the death, the disappointment. But these could not defeat the Father's love for him. And the life he had prepared.

And so ^{God intends} ~~we declare~~ it shall be for us and for ~~all~~ ^{all} our neighbors. The pain, the tragedy, the disappointment of our living cannot defeat our Father's love. Jesus the light, will shine for us in the darkest night, through the lonliast hour. He is the center.

There was a people sent by God to live in Perkins County. They were sent to this earth to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through them.

I think of our life together and how wasy it is still to live for self and self alone. How easy it is to deceive ourselves into thinking the world was created for us, for our needs, for our glory, rather than we created to glorify God. How easy it is to put me in the center, and then be dismayed when what has happened to others happens also to me.

God sent his son, the light of the world. When we know that he is the reason for our being, and not we the reason for his, then we ^{know the truth that shall} ~~see things as they~~ are. Amen.