

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid

A Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent | Year B | Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28

St. Alban's Church, Sinking Spring, PA

17 December 2017

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we continue to prepare ourselves during this season of Advent for meeting the Christ child again at Christmas, I might ask us to pause for these few moments and remember the *first* time we each met Christ -- the first time we were introduced to Jesus.

In your life, who was it that first introduced you to Jesus?

Maybe it was a friend -- the Sunday school teacher who helped you with your arts and crafts and taught you all about how a kind man named Jesus helped others, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and loved all of God's children -- even you!

Or maybe that friend invited you to church. It's hard to find a new church home, isn't it? Maybe this was one of those times in your life when you were new to an area and didn't really know your way around, and a generous neighbor invited you to go to church, to meet some people, and see what their congregation was all about. This happens way more often than you'd imagine -- studies have repeatedly shown that upwards of 70 percent of people who are personally asked and invited to church actually say yes! Imagine the possibilities of so many of our friends joining us for worship!

If it wasn't a friend, maybe it was a member of your family -- maybe Mom read you Bible stories at night or sang hymns to you as you were going to sleep. Maybe Dad drove you to church and helped out with your Youth Group. Maybe your sister, on an early Saturday morning, woke you up so that you could help her as she threw a wedding for Barbie and Ken using the marriage rite in the Book of Common Prayer...

Or maybe it wasn't a person at all. Maybe you were seeking all your life for truth, for answers -- and maybe you still are, and that's ok, you're welcome here! -- and in your quest you found yourself reading scripture -- found yourself drawn to the story of a man who blessed children and forgave the sins of those who came to him in faith; a man who drew crowds by the thousands, feeding them with his words and with bread and wine; a man who set his face towards Jerusalem to face the powers of his day as the one who bore our iniquities, was pierced for our transgressions, and by whose wounds we were *healed*; a man who was both Son of Man and Son of God.

It *is* the greatest story ever told -- and we've heard the start of it today. Like each of our stories, each of our own personal introductions to Jesus, everyone else who has ever heard the name of Jesus had to be introduced to him, too. And for many, they heard about him from the beginning, as the Word that was with God, and that the Word was God; that what came into being in him was life, and that life was the light of all people. It's quite the introduction in John's Gospel, and right from the start John the Evangelist wants his entire audience to know exactly who they're dealing with. Jesus is the Light of the World, the Word made flesh, and Jesus is God or he is no one. For John, the good news of Jesus Christ immediately had a witness, the one who came as a witness to testify to the light.

This great witness, the one crying out in the wilderness, the one making the Lord's path straight, the one introducing Christ to the confused priests and Levites from Jerusalem, is John the Baptist. Think about the person who introduced you to Jesus -- and think of how important that introduction turned out to be! And now think about how John the Baptist was the one who first told countless people about Jesus for the very first time. For many, John's words were the very first that told them anything about this Jesus, the one who is powerful, the one who is coming soon, the one who is worthy, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist's role in the Christian faith cannot be overvalued. He was the friend who told all he knew about this coming Savior, the one whom the prophets foretold. He was the family member who brought his family to know of Christ, famously leaping in his mother Elizabeth's womb when the pregnant Mary walked into the room. John was the one who brought scripture to the masses, telling them that the one Isaiah was talking about -- the one on whom the Spirit of God came, the one who brings good news to the oppressed, the one who loves justice and comforts those who mourn -- that one, Jesus Christ, is coming soon! Three Advent candles soon!

John the Baptist always pointed to Jesus in everything he did, and at some point, someone has been John the Baptist to each of us, pointing us in the direction of Christ, helping us prepare our pathway towards God, teaching us about the one who came into the world on the very first Christmas.

Now allow me to ask another question -- what if they hadn't?

What if Isaiah hadn't prophesied about the messiah to come?

What if John the Baptist hadn't pointed towards Jesus?

What if John the Evangelist didn't take the time to write about the Light coming into the world?

And what if the person who introduced you to Christ never did so?

God has done so much through so many people through the eternity of time until this very moment so that the Word of God would be spoken through prophets and sages, matriarchs and patriarchs, saints and sinners, priests and laity, Sunday School teachers and family members and at some point in that long line of succession -- to each of us.

Were there a break in that chain of people who courageously told Christ's story to someone else, I'm not sure we're all here gathered together today. It really *is* the greatest story ever told, and it is a story that each of us has been asked to tell in our lives to all we encounter. We, who have been given the gift of Jesus in our lives by the many people who have helped us in our faith journeys must do all that we can to make sure that story is told again and again. Really imagine where we'd be if the Sunday School teachers, the parents, the siblings, the chaplains, the friends of ours who told us the story never did -- what has it meant to you? How has being introduced to Jesus changed your life?

Today we have heard again the beginning of the story of the Light that is coming into the world. You, like John the Baptist, have the chance now to help someone else hear it, to introduce someone else to the story of Jesus.

Who will you tell?