

# Third Sunday of Advent, Year B

## IS THERE ANYTHING NEW TO BE SAID?

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Third Sunday in Advent

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

*6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*

*19This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. 24Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." 28This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.*



## **DIAGNOSIS: There Is Nothing New**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Rules Are Set***

**Grounding:** The facts were known. The rules had been set. Those allowed to speak had spoken. So when John the Baptist came as a witness to testify to the light, he spoke of something not known, and he spoke of a life outside the set rules, and he spoke of one who had new things to say. But because John's news was new, people were suspicious of him. How did he fit into what was already known? How did he fit into the rules that had already been set? If he didn't fit, then he was not legitimate. He could not be trusted.

**Tracking:** We work to figure out our lives and how we want to spend our time. We work to figure out what we want and what we like. And when we know what we like to do and what we like, we

stick to those things. And God forbid that we would have to change our minds about our preferences. But we are limited by our situation and what is available to us to know. If we belong to a certain culture, then that is our culture—the facts and the rules are set. Tradition has spoken. We see this set way of doing things in what political ideology, or racial profiling, or identity politics. We accept that the rule of winning is what we want. We accept the rule of success as the way to measure what we do. We accept the rule of getting things done each day as the way to evaluate the goodness of the day and thus our own goodness and worth. And that is all we have. We have nothing new.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Trust the Rules We Have***

**Grounding:** John came to testify to the light. That light is life, life for all people is in him—the Word who is God (John 1:4). That life is embodied in the Father’s only Son, and is full of grace and truth. From his fullness we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16-17). Grace is the new word, the gift that is not earned, not deserved, not worked for. No longer is life only about what we choose as good. The Word makes life with God good—a gift, a word that Elijah and the prophets attested to.

**Tracking:** Our facts, our rules, what we say—we depend on these to get us through the day and to manage our life. We trust that following our rules is the best way to win, to have a useful life. We will not give up our trust in our way of doing things.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Our Hearts Are Dark***

**Grounding:** The light comes into the world because there is darkness and death. The darkness is all that makes us feel judged, even judged by God. The darkness is anything that happens that makes us wonder, “How does God feel about me? How

good is my life? Is there any meaning to what I do?"

**Tracking:** We see the inevitability of death and shrug it off as nothing we can do anything about. We fail to see the darkness in our facts and in our rules and in what we claim. We do not realize the darkness of our hearts—hate, anger, prejudice, wanting what others have, greed, our need to be first, to win, to be better than others. We do not see the darkness of our hearts that insist on doing what we want without any regard for God. God sees.

**PROGNOSIS:            Jesus            Is            Someone            New**





#### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): His Heart Is Light***

**Grounding:** The Word became flesh and lives among us. That Word's name is Jesus. He is the one who stands among the people, but the people do not know him. The people are so ignorant of who he is that they kill him on a cross using their facts, their rules, and what they have said against him. That is how much they prefer their life to his life of grace. But that darkness of death does not overcome the light. The Son rises.

**Crossing:** Jesus overcomes our death. He promises to give us his life of grace now and forever. As we live in him, even though we die, we live!

#### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): We Trust Jesus and His Grace***

**Grounding:** Life is in Jesus. Life in Jesus is grace. Grace is a

new fact in our lives. Grace is a new way to live, far different from our rules and ways of reward and punishment, merit and demerit, carrot and stick, success and failure, winning and losing. Grace is God's love as a gift—no obligations, no gratitude owed.

**Crossing:** We no longer have to trust in our way of doing things because we now trust the way of Jesus. We die to our old ways and to our rules. We rise to live in the culture of Jesus—the culture of grace. We have this new word of grace in our lives. We trust Jesus for how to live.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Grace Is Free to Act in New Ways***

**Grounding:** John pointed us to Jesus so we could trust Jesus, the one who brings us his light. Jesus needs to be pointed out to us because he is new and his way of grace is new.

**Crossing:** Now that we know Jesus and trust him and his way of grace, others around us need to have Jesus pointed out to them because he is new. Grace will not be known unless it is offered to others. We cannot figure out grace on our own. It needs to be told and to be given. One way we tell others of Jesus and his grace is to give them grace. Grace frees us to give love in any new way that serves the needs of others. We can give without thanks. We can forgive, instead of demanding what is owed to us. Culture and rules do not limit what we do. Grace frees us to serve all people.