

Third Sunday in Advent

THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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Analysis by Timothy J. 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.

19 This 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: IT'S SO DARK I CAN'T SEE A THING

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Too Dark for*

Proper Identification

Someone named John caused a stir in the community because he was speaking to anyone who would listen that there was another someone amongst them who was from God and was bringing grace and truth from God (1:17). The regular speakers about God did not know John and so did not know by what authority John testified. They had the law that came from Moses (1:17) as their authority. But the law emits darkness in two ways. The first way is that it increases unbelief by causing people to trust it for righteousness before God. The second way is that it tells people they are doing wrong when they do not act in love toward their neighbor or when they do not act in faith. The regular God proclaimers were using the law as their way to relate to God and to gain God's acceptance. Since John was testifying that someone was coming with a new way to relate to God, they did not trust John. It was so dark for those regular speakers about God that they could not identify who John was. They could not believe that someone unknown was testifying that God was doing something new and good about the problem of people not loving and fearing God. Even worse, they could not recognize the light of God when that light was shining in the world; they could not accept him (1:11).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Dark Is Distrust of God's Light that Takes Away the Distrust of the World*

Not fearing and loving God is the darkness that prevents people from seeing the light of God, the very light through whom all things came into being (v. 2). They could not see God's light as grace and truth but instead were looking for a "Messiah" (an earthly king anointed by God), for Elijah or "the prophet"-someone who spoke God's word as demands and judgments. The regular speakers about God thought they could meet God's demands and so were not judged by God or judged as right with God

because of what they did. They were in the dark about their own need to have their unbelief (sin) taken away. That is why they could not see that John was preparing the way of the Lord, making the way of the Lord straight (v. 23) so that people would be prepared to be shown the light that gave them life with God (v. 4, 1:9).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *At Noon a Darkness Covered the Whole Earth*

When in the darkness, people are not children of God. Instead, people are children of the flesh or of the will of mortals, but not of God (1:13). People of the flesh are subject to the way of flesh, namely, that all flesh withers and decays. All flesh dies and no longer has existence with God, just as the law insists, "The soul that does not believe shall die." That is people's wilderness.

PROGNOSIS: WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF A FATHER'S ONLY SON

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Light Shines in the Darkness*

Jesus, the Son of God and the light of all people and their light, came into the world. He gave people life with God (v. 4). The law, which demanded death, insisted that Jesus be stopped, for he was thwarting that ultimate demand. Jesus gave life with God to people by taking their death as his own on a cross, thus fulfilling the law and its demand for death. Then he took his life-giving light and gave it to all people, giving them the power to become children of God. His death on the cross was how Jesus was full of God's grace-full forgiveness for sinners. "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (1:16). Jesus is close to the Father's heart and has made God's mercy known (1:18).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *By the Light We See We Are Made Children of God*

The darkness of people's distrust has not overcome Jesus' light of forgiveness, nor his ability to make people the children of God. ("Children" is about the new familial relationship of forgiveness and faith between God and his people, not about age or maturity.) Jesus' light shines because his glory is his cross. Those who have the light of Jesus shine on them, who receive Jesus, who trust him to make them children of God, are children of God. This is of God (1:13). Jesus gives people the power to become children of God. That power is faith in him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Bring the Light into the Darkness*

There is still darkness out in the wilderness, the darkness of unfaith, and the Father's heart of forgiveness is not known. Those who have faith in Jesus are sent into that darkness and get to be the new voice in the wilderness, a voice that does not cry, "Make straight the way of the Lord," but the voice that declares, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Those who trust that Jesus has forgiven them, get to tell others that Jesus forgives them also. Jesus makes known to them the Father's heart of mercy and forgiveness, the heart of a Father who loves his children because of what Christ has done. People cannot know of the Father's mercy when they are left in the dark by the law that judges them. The children of the Father get to shine light and life (Jesus' forgiveness) into the law's condemning darkness and overcome it. Forgiveness is the new way of life, the way of the Father's children.