

*John 1:6-8, 19-28*

1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

1:7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

1:8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

1:19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

1:20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

1:21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

1:23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

1:24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

1:25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

1:26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know,

1:27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

1:28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

I was with a group of pastors a few months ago and we were talking about being pastors. Several of them were discouraged and were thinking aloud about doing something else. They said they were burnt out, that they was tired of being all things to all people and couldn't do it any longer. I can certainly understand how that would be tiring, and I suspect that sometime in the next year, unless they find a way to balance their lives, they'll be doing something different.

It made me think about all the people I know who have what seems to me to be an impossible job, but instead of being exhausted, seem to thrive. I don't want to embarrass him, but I thought of Larry Cordray, who's been teaching school and working as a school administrator for 44 years. I remember, back in my mid-20's, working one day as a substitute teacher at the high school in Danville. The next morning the school phoned and asked if I could return and I told them I had post-traumatic stress disorder and wouldn't be returning.

All of this was on my mind when I opened my Bible this week to read the Advent reading for today, and a line jumped out at me. You know how that works. You've read the same story dozens of times, and a line that never really spoke to you before, leaps out and grabs you by the lapels. That happened to me. The line, written about John the Baptist, was this: *He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*

*He himself was not the light.*

Sometimes, we are emotionally and physically exhausted through no fault of our own. The circumstances of life, things we can't help, have simply overwhelmed us—illness, loss, lack of resources, betrayal, separation, disillusionment, bad luck, and even evil. We are all susceptible to these things, and when we are visited by them, they can leave us emotionally and physically overwhelmed and broken. It can happen to any of us, and if it hasn't happened to you, it's only because 1.) you haven't lived long enough, or 2.) you have been incredibly, unfathomably lucky.

Other times, we are emotionally and physically exhausted because we have forgotten a great truth. It is the truth John the gospel-writer said about John the Baptist. *He himself was not the light.* That is, John the Baptist was not the epitome of human perfection, John the Baptist was not God in human form, John the Baptist was not the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. John the Baptist was not the Savior. John the Baptist was not the light of the world. And neither am I, and neither are you.

I wonder if this is why the arrival of Jesus was called good news. Because it put us in our place. I don't mean that in a bad way. I don't mean it in a finger-pointing, scolding way. *Someone needs to put you in your place!* I don't mean it that way. I mean it in the way people mean when they're contented and happy and they say, "Ahh, I've found my place in the world."

Like when Larry walks into a classroom and says, “Ah, I’ve found my place.”

Or Jim McClung steps onto his sailboat and says, “Ah, I’ve found my place.”

Or Mary Dooley enters a wildlife refuge and sees whooping cranes and says, “Ah, I’ve found my place.”

So Jesus comes into the world and one of the things he teaches us is that we don’t have to be God, we don’t have to assume ultimate responsibility for everything that goes on, because that isn’t our place. We do have to assume responsibility for our lives, of course, and the sooner the better. We do have to find our place. But we are not the light. That’s not our place. So if you’ve been doing that job, if you’ve been running here and there acting as if you’re the light, quit before you’re fired. Or quit before you exhaust yourself. Or quit before you annoy everyone and end up friendless. That’s not your place. That’s not my place. We are not the light. Maybe we’re *a* light, but we’re not *the* light.

Now let’s think for a moment about John the Baptist. Put yourself in his place for a moment. You’ve been given this huge responsibility. You’ve known about it all your life, because the angel Gabriel came from heaven before you were born and appeared to your father, and said, “You’re going to have a son. Name him John. He’s going to have a special job. He’s going to announce the arrival of the Lord.”

The priest tells his wife, and nine months later the poor kid is born to a priest and a Jewish mother telling him how important he is and that he better not screw things up. Now, if you're John the Baptist, how do you live with that kind of pressure? Because you have to find a way to live with it, or it'll drive you crazy. So if you're John the Baptist, how do you live with the pressure? You say to yourself, over and over, *I am not the light. That's not my place. My place is to tell others of the light.*

I don't know if you've found your place in the world. I hope you have. Because when you're in your place, you can do things that would exhaust others. And when they're in their place, they can do things that would exhaust you.

It is a wise use of your time and intelligence to find your place in the world. It will bring you great joy. Just make sure it is your place. Find your place. Then be *a* light, and let God be *the* light.