



“Circle of Light: Witness”

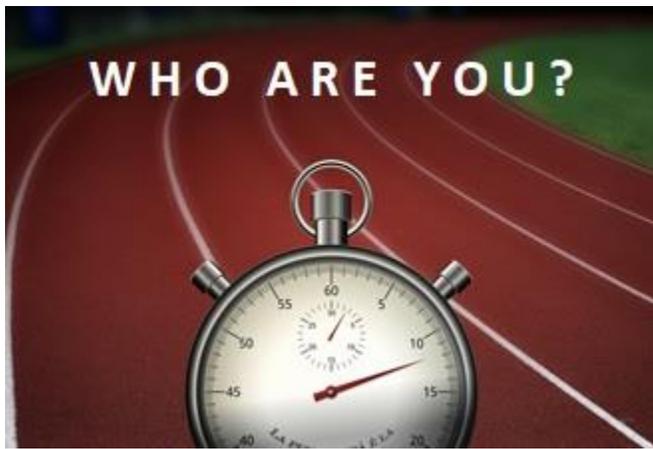
Third Sunday of Advent
Saturday and Sunday, December 16–17, 2017

All Services
The Reverend Jennifer A. Crist
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Let us pray: God who names and claims us, come to us this advent season; enlighten us to know who we are; and to use our uniqueness for your glory to participate in your kingdom on earth. Amen

Who are you? How do you introduce yourself to people?



I am going to ask you to do something this morning that I don't usually do during sermon time, which is to play a quick game. You will simply turn to a person next to you and ask them "Who are you?" They will give you one answer. Then you ask them again "Who are you?" And they give one more answer. For example, if I was asked this question, "Who are you?" I might answer: pastor, mother, martial artist, but after I got those type things out of the way, I might give answers

more like: justice-seeker or creative thinker.

So, find someone near you to work with. We will play this game for one minute, and then switch roles. OK, on your mark, get set, go: Who are you? OK, now switch roles: On your mark, get set, go. OK, our time is up. Thank you for participating in this short game.

So, did you feel like you were being interrogated a little bit during this game? How did you define yourself?

I first played this game at a meeting of community leaders in Washington DC. We didn't know each other at all when we entered the room, but after several rounds of this game with several different people, we learned that we had a room of diversely-gifted people with similar values.

Many of you who played this game probably already knew each other, but I bet some of you didn't. And even if you did, I bet many of you learned something new about each other. You probably also noticed that you could answer this question, "Who are you?" in many different ways.

And that is exactly what John, who we know as John the Baptist, was doing in our gospel reading this morning. And John WAS being interrogated by priests and Levites from Jerusalem. John first answers this question, "Who are you?" by saying who he is NOT. He is NOT the Messiah. Then he is asked if he is Elijah or the prophet, both of which he says, he is not. Then the priests and Levites seem a bit frustrated and ask, well then, if you are not any of those, "Who are you?" To which John gives his second answer, quoting a verse from the book of Isaiah that we heard last Sunday: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."



This seems even more frustrating to the priests and Levites, who then question the legality of John baptizing if he is not the Messiah or Elijah or the prophet. John then explains his role, his action in baptizing with water, again pointing to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.



This passage from the gospel of John is filled with legal language from the courtroom of a witness being questioned and then testifying with testimony. In fact, the verb, to testify, is prominent in the gospel of John. Though it is barely present in the other three gospels, verb forms of "to testify" occur 35 times in the gospel of John, and the noun form "testimony" occurs 14 times. A testifier or witness in Greek is "μαρτυρια." Say that with me: "μαρτυρια." What does that sound like? Martyr, right? That is where our English word "martyr" comes from.

The gospel of John is very focused on being sent to be a martyr, one who is a witness for Jesus. And just as John's action of baptizing was considered to be an action that pointed toward the kingdom of God coming to earth, our testifying, our witnessing in the world around us, points to Jesus and the kingdom of God breaking into the world in big and small ways each and every day.

our sins and bring us everlasting life. And isn't that a great starting point from which to explore who we are?
Who are you?

What do you stand for? What were the answers you gave in the game that spoke to the essence of who you are?

What is God uniquely gifting you to be used for? This is your vocation. This is your way of being a witness in our world for Jesus Christ. And your witness, your life testimony is intricately linked with others.



I was last in Guatemala over Thanksgiving to break ground on a girls' school that will be named Hope Academy. As I prepared for the Hope Academy ground-breaking and reflected on the journey toward it over the last many years, I decided that I wanted to tell a story. This was not my individual story, though it includes my individual story. But rather, this story is a collective story of a community. And so, I wove a story together to try to tell the collective story, giving a bit of the story and then inviting someone up to talk about their piece. What I had expected was that we were creating a string of stories. The surprise I experienced was that we ended up creating a tapestry of

testimonies, with each person standing and speaking as a witness as to how God brought all of the people and pieces together, using each of their unique gifts and abilities for the good of the community. These stories were not chronological, as I had naively initially perceived, but rather were like pieces of wool, each handspun uniquely and individually, then woven into a dimensional fabric that was manifesting as a school for girls.

What had begun as a testimony of lack of opportunity in the presence of poverty turned into a Holy Spirit-empowered compilation of testimonies all pointing toward the kingdom of God breaking into the world of little Guatemalan girls.



And so, I ask you, how does being part of THIS community at Trinity Lutheran Church multiply and amplify your story for the good of the community inside these walls, but also the broader community outside as well that is waiting as we wait this Advent season for

the coming of God's kingdom in the form of a weak and vulnerable baby who will grow to be a man willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of you and me and all the world.

How will we be a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for Christ to come again?

Recognizing that God is not only WITH us, but working THROUGH us to accomplish God's work in the world, in what unique ways are you God's witness in the world? And what are you a witness for?

What is your life a testimony of?

The spirit of the Lord God is upon YOU
because the Lord has anointed
YOU through your baptism
to send you and me to bring good news
to the oppressed
to bind up the broken-hearted
to proclaim liberty to those who are
captive
to comfort those who mourn



to love and seek justice

We have been clothed with the garments of salvation and covered with Christ's robe of righteousness.

We are blessed by the Lord and freed to rejoice in the Lord and to exult God with our whole beings

Freed by Christ and Equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit,
Let us go out into all the world as witnesses of Jesus

as he comes close to us to bring the kingdom of God near....

Come, Lord Jesus,
Thanks be to God!

Amen!!



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