

Sermon Notes: December 13, 2020

Focus: Prepare and Witness to the Way of the Lord.

[All Readings](#)

I want to talk about witnessing. John the Baptist is a witness to God's light. The gospel reading today does not highlight all the wonderful details of John the Baptist that you know. There is no noshing on locusts or camel hair sweaters. The Gospel of John sees John the Baptist as an active witness to the light of an up-and-coming preacher, Jesus. John saw light in Jesus; which was the same light shining at the beginning of the world.

I want to explore different types of witness as a way of light and life. You can witness by observation and witness by proclamation. I'll also talk about prayer and boredom as part of this puzzle to know the light inside and shine the light.

Observation as witness This kind of witness is passive. You 'behold' how God is working in your life. The process of observation can lead to a powerful sense that God is not finished with you. The more comfortable you grow with staring unflinchingly at all you are becoming, the more strength you will find to actively seek and know the light of God. This is mostly a posture of holy curiosity.

Proclamation as witness This kind of witness is active. You tell others, *Jesus loves me this I know cause the Bible tells me so*. This kind of proclamation is lampooned as a street preacher screaming about the perdition of hellfire. But that's a strawman.

You are a proclaimer even if you are not the least bit tempted to take to the streets with a bullhorn. You are a proclaiming witness. Proclamation is sacred. You speak of the light inside you and that light shines with your peculiar hue.

When you share your story, others have the opportunity to glimpse their own light. Proclamation is not righteous self-congratulations. It is humbly showing your light and helping others grow stronger. I don't care how battered and dim you feel, you are a sacred proclamation and a sacred lantern. St. Francis said, "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."

If you're doing great right now - I rejoice that you have been spared the nearly universal exhaustion of 2020. You have received a gift to be shared and you can help others find light. If you feel like the bulb is almost burnt out, shine with what the Lord gave ya.

Boredom Early in the pandemic, I used to say we had two churches: The *isolated* church (families without kids in school) and the *overwhelmed* church (school-age families). The two groups have always had radically different challenges. As this pandemic wears on, it seems that those two groups are meeting at a crossroads -- boredom. Empty nesters aren't traveling, families have found their boring groove with school, and few are going home for the holidays.

Boredom as the witness Boredom is a superpower that I avoid at all cost. I fill my days with activity to keep the boredom at bay. I see this in my fellow clergy. We are exhausted, depleted and often overwhelmed. We trained for something much different than being video producers and zoom meet-ers. All the regular benchmarks for church life are temporarily gone. So, we fling ourselves at zoom, remote liturgies, committee upon committee, pastoral phone calls and generally feel busier than before the pandemic. These choices keep boredom (and maybe an identity crisis) at bay.

Here is what I have noticed in myself. Many days, my brain is like a car overheating. I have my right foot on the gas and my left foot on the brake generating a lot of heat and noise, but I haven't left the garage. So that I don't break the car, I have decided to try something different: cultivating boredom. There are a least three of you who will email me with some version of "we don't pay you to be bored." I will politely respond to your email, but you will have missed my point.

Last Sunday Dec 6, I took my favorite time-wasting app off my phone, so that when I am truly in neutral, I am not still punching the gas in the garage. With God's help, I am going to stop trying to drive to some elusive utopia. I won't be reading the latest blog post that claims to have the golden plates that will help me build a growing and rocking pandemic church. The golden solution is supposedly simple, if only I would take the first step by buying their book. For December, I won't look at message boards promising a thriving children's ministry on Zoom. I am trying my best to insert a little boredom, trusting that God is the one, not me, carrying our church in 2020, 2021 and beyond.

A minor podcast celebrity, mom, and journalist Manoush Zomorodi did an insightful TED talk on the power of boredom: [How boredom can lead to your most brilliant ideas](#). She spends the whole time talking about how we are running from boredom to our peril. Phone, apps, computers are great distractions and even more noble endeavors like workaholism and keeping up on the news are also great ways to run from boredom. If you are older, not traveling, and don't have family around -- maybe you have become more comfortable with boredom. If so, teach those of us who aren't.

Prayer as witness Rocky Bleier was an average NFL player who clawed his way to excellence through a circuitous route. In the 1968 draft, he was picked in the 16th round (417) to go to the Pittsburgh Steelers. After his rookie year, he was drafted into the Army and decided not to pull strings to avoid serving. He was sent to Vietnam where he would be severely injured, returned back to the US, and improbably rejoined the Steelers in 1970. Despite months of literally limping around the practice field, he turned out to be a beast in the weight room, and ultimately became a fierce weapon in Terry Bradshaw's storied Super Bowl 13 victory *after* his military service.

I am not trying to fill you with NFL trivia for its own sake, but to give context for what I think is a great foxhole prayer. (A foxhole is a pit dug by soldiers in combat for immediate protection against enemy fire). A foxhole prayer is always a quid pro quo (this for that) plea to God. “If only I survive this battle, I’ll become a monk to serve you, God.” Foxhole prayers are about as shockingly novel as jailhouse religious conversions or sports commentators stating the obvious. However, Bleier’s prayer is noteworthy. ESPN daily narrates:

When he is caught in a fire fight in Vietnam, he recounts on ESPN daily, “Boom, everybody hits the deck. I felt a thud in my left leg, I got hit.” In that moment, he thinks to himself, “Lord, if you get me out of this, I promise you, I will do everything I can to maximize the life that you’ve given me to live. I’ll do everything I can to honor the fact that you allowed me to survive this.” He says, “I will do everything I can to maximize the life you’ve given me.”

That, my friends, is worth memorizing for everyday repetition and prayer:

I will do everything I can to maximize the life you’ve given me.

Try it. It is not falsely humble. It is an artisanal, custom-made, handcrafted, prayer that can fit each of us. [ESPN Daily’s Podcast episode about Rocky](#) is worth the whole listen.

Maximum boredom Rocky is sort of the active side of witness, while Manoush shows us the power of boredom as a way to the maximum creativity.

“Preparing the way of the Lord” require witness and courage. You can witness the miracle that you are. You can tell of the love you know. You can try something different. It can’t hurt because all your trips are on hold; Costco now counts as tourism; and your kid’s eyes are permanently crossed from the day’s screen time.

Even in a time such as this, we are fearfully and wonderfully made of light.

Todd