



Grain

“If old truths are to retain their hold on people’s minds, they must be restated in the language and concepts of successive generations.” –F.A. Hayek
Submitted by Rev. Peter Heide, Baraboo

Field

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. John 1:6-8, 19-28

Thoughts

John the Baptist must have been tempted to say he was more than he was, otherwise, why would he confess he was not the Messiah rather than simply deny it? Why do we even know about his internal struggle as people asked him if he was the one they had been waiting for? He likely told someone, and in the form of a confession. Inadvertently, John the Baptist’s confession must have made him freer and a more powerful witness to the light.

In St. Mark’s version of John the Baptist in the wilderness, we’re led to focus on baptism by water and fire. In St. John’s Gospel, we are in wonder of who Jesus is, which leads us to reflect on our own identity. When Jesus appears, so do people’s realizations, temptations, and demons. The Baptist’s preparing the way of the Lord included his admitting who he was and was not. How many times have we had to confess who we were not, what we had control over and have not? Such freedom there is in confessing reality.

Later in Jesus’ ministry, when John was in jail and heard about the unexpected ways Jesus was engaging with people, John sent the message to Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” John the Baptist’s great prophetic voice, the sort we could use today, was a witness to the light but never a full expression of it.

In preparing the way for celebrating the birth of Jesus, what do we need to confess about who we are and are not as individuals and a church? As a church we have begun repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and calling for the truth in history to be taught in schools. We strive to include LGBTQ+ people in the pews and behind pulpits. We witness to light without having an absolute corner on the truth. Letting go of what the light reveals as false we find our voice in facing injustice and may be more fluid witnesses to God’s grace. Happy Monday!

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Many blessings upon you,

Pastor Cindy