



Meditation for the Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2020

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. (Isaiah 61.1)

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

Some of you may be familiar with the book entitled *The Noticer* by Andy Andrews. It tells the story of a man named Jones, who teaches people to see themselves in new ways. As he puts it: *I'm a noticer. . . . I notice things that other people overlook. I notice things about situations and people that produce perspective. That's what most folks lack—perspective—a broader view. So I give them that broader view . . . and it allows them to regroup and take a breath, and begin their lives.*

Jones meets the narrator when he is homeless, living under a bridge near the Gulf of Mexico. Jones offers the young man what he calls "a feast": canned Vienna sausages & sardines. After they have been sitting on the beach eating for awhile, Jones looks at him and says, "So . . . what are you eating?"

"I'm eating sardines and Vienna sausages," the young man replies.

"Where?" asks Jones.

"In the sand."

Jones replies: "While you ate sardines and Vienna sausages in the sand, I dined on surf and turf with an ocean view."
-Andy Andrews, *The Noticer* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, pp. 11-16]

Jones is the kind of witness that John the Baptist was and that we are called to be. Like John we are not the Messiah. Like Jones we are not magicians. Like them, we are surrounded by people who have lost hope, who have forgotten what it means to have joy. Like Jones and John the Baptist, we are witnesses to the light that persists in the darkness of ignorance and fear.

Last week we saw in the Gospel of Mark that John the Baptist was bold and brash, a wild man who called complacent religious leaders a *brood of vipers* and who spoke confidently about the one who would come after him baptizing *by the Holy Spirit and fire*. This week, we see in the Gospel of John that John the Baptist was a humble spiritual leader who felt he was *not worthy to untie the thong of the sandal* of the teacher who would come after him. According to the Gospel of Mark John was a rebel; according to the Gospel of John he was a humble witness. In the Gospel of Mark, John calls us to turn away from darkness; in the Gospel of John, he calls us to turn towards light.

Like John the Baptist and Jones, we do not pretend that we walk on paths that are already straight. Like them we know that being truly alive depends upon paying attention to the brokenhearted. Like them, we know that we are not alone and that no matter what their standing in the world our companions *will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord*. Like them, we have a vision that is possible only in faith. Like them, we *notice*.