

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
17 December 2017  
Advent III B (John 1:6-8,19-28)

There was a man who thought he was sent by God, and his name was not John. He came as a witness on behalf of those who needed a Messiah. His theology was somewhat obscure, but he was not the light. This is the testimony given by not-John when some people confronted him and said, "Christmas isn't Christian enough!" He went about the countryside, proclaiming their news. He went to Wal-Mart, he went to Target and Starbucks. He went to schools and he went to the City Council, proclaiming, "Christmas isn't Christian enough!" As I have written, his theology was somewhat obscure, somewhat light, but he was not the light.

You must have read about this in the news that always surfaces sometime in December – that certain groups of Christians proclaim, as they have for a decade, that there's a war on Christmas. Poor persecuted little Christians. "It's not Winter Vacation," they've proclaimed to the schools, "It is Christmas vacation!" "It's not a Holiday Sale," they've proclaimed to K-Mart, "It's a Christmas Sale!" Several years ago, when then-Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia sent out a press release announcing plans for a "holiday tree" lighting at the state capital, he was bombarded – and half an hour later his office sent out another press release saying, "It is in fact a Christmas tree."

Well, thank you for clearing that up.

And that's all very well and good for those of us who are Christian. I mean, perhaps we do need to be reminded of the basic truth of Christmas, the Incarnation of God Almighty right here on earth, in the person of Jesus Christ, born of our sister Mary. And I, for one, gladly and cheerfully wish all and sundry "Merry Christmas" – because that is how I designate the holiday!

But is it the duty of Kohl's Department Store to spread the Good News of God in Christ?

I don't think so, and I find this attempt to relegate our responsibility as People of God, as the Church, to secular institutions who serve all sorts of people, quite disturbing. I mean, if we're expecting them to proclaim the Good News, might that not mean that we -- you and I – aren't doing it very well?

Perhaps this guy not-John would like to explain why he needs the local department store to remind him that it's Christmas. Maybe he just wants to show our non-Christian brothers and sisters that we have a *real* holiday!

And maybe people like not-John are living in some sort of irrational fear – the fear that their own particular faith, *our* own particular faith, is in danger of being overrun by **gasp** "those people." You know, people of different faiths. Or people of no faith.

I must admit, I was heartened by the election this week. It actually gave me hope. And it has caused me to reflect on the determination of women of color to send that vile man packing. We owe them. Big time.

I was remembering back when he abdicated his civic responsibility by posting the Ten Commandments on the courthouse lawn. As if Christians needed to be reminded. He was, in a sense, advocating the idea that we need secular institutions – like the court – to remind us of our own heritage and our faith because, well, maybe because we're not doing it very well ourselves. And so we'll tell department stores and universities and city governments and coffee shops that they need to do the work for us.

Why? Because we're lazy Christians? Is the United States of America *really supposed to be a Christian nation*? Well, if it is, our representatives are doing a lousy job.

Maybe we do need someone to remind us.

Stephen Colbert has put this issue very well in my opinion. He said, "If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it." (End quote.)

Our so-called Christian representatives continue to pull back from funding programs designed to lift people out of poverty. They continue to pull back from funding basic education. They continue to allow gerrymandering (and I include both parties) which inhibits the people's voice. We continue to allow the suppression of the voting rights of people whose voices are already crushed. We continue to allow our representatives to do *nothing* to ensure that *nine million children* will be without healthcare in January.

What is Christian about this picture???

It's pathetic. But at least that vile man can ride out of town on his horse.

And I still have hope.

I have hope that out of deep darkness the light of Christ can burst forth. That justice and mercy will prevail. That compassion will return as the norm. That people will rise up against oppression, the sin of racism, the sin of misogyny, the sin of abuse, and will say "No more!"

There are voices crying in the wilderness. We must *listen* and we must *respond*.

Just last week the President said, ""You remember the campaign. I said, 'Let me begin by wishing each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas,'" he said to cheers from the crowd. He said he can think of no better Christmas present for the American people than a massive tax cut."

Seriously? Well I can think of a whole lot of better Christmas presents: Adequate and affordable health care. Good preschools and elementary schools for *all* children. Funding for low-income housing. (Remember Jesus telling us to care for the poor?) Regulations to keep our water and our air safe. (Aren't we supposed to be stewards of God's creation?) If you want a really wowzer of a Christmas, maybe the acknowledgment that we *white* people are the illegal immigrants in this land and that the First Nation people have endured for too long the injustices we have perpetrated upon them. Or how about the acknowledgment that without

the sweat of black human beings this nation would have been a backwater colony for years, maybe centuries.

Those would look a whole lot better under the national Christmas tree.

OK, end of rant. It's the holiday season. I mean the Christmas season. And I live in hope.

The voices crying in the wilderness are showing us toward the light. The light that is our salvation, the light that is love.

Here's a poem by Jan Richardson.

**Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light**

Blessed are you  
 who bear the light  
 in unbearable times,  
 who testify  
 to its endurance  
 amid the unendurable,  
 who bear witness  
 to its persistence  
 when everything seems  
 in shadow  
 and grief.

Blessed are you  
 in whom  
 the light lives,  
 in whom  
 the brightness blazes—  
 your heart  
 a chapel,  
 an altar where  
 in the deepest night  
 can be seen  
 the fire that  
 shines forth in you  
 in unaccountable faith  
 in stubborn hope  
 in love that illumines  
 every broken thing  
 it finds.

Everyone: Let your light shine.

Amen.

