

A WITNESS TO TESTIFY

(John 1:6-8, 19-28)

- Intro: When my son Josh was in elementary school.
- His first and second grade classroom.
 - #Visited the work sites of their parents.
 - *To learn what their parents did.
 - Normally we would never have children in the St. Louis County Jail.
 - #I hated tours.
 - *As though people were coming to look at monkeys in the zoo.
 - #But there were never tours for children.
 - *Unless a judge might order a "scared straight" tour.
 - +For some juvenile delinquents.
 - It took some doing.
 - #But I arranged for 22 first and second graders to come to the jail.
 - *They didn't get a tour.
 - *They were in the visiting room with me.
 - +On the other side of a large window.
 - =Sally port.
 - Through which they could see:
 - #Correctional officers.
 - #Inmates.
 - *Going back and forth.
 - +To court.
 - +To the gym.
 - =For recreation.
 - =Control center.
 - Where an officer controlled movement.
 - #Watching TV monitors.
 - #Opening and closing doors.
 - #While we sat in the visiting room.
 - *I told them about:
 - +My work.
 - +My ministry.
 - *They got to ask questions.
 - +What I liked about my job.
 - +What I didn't like about my job.
 - +What was the hardest thing about my job.
 - Then they went back to school.
 - #They wrote an essay about what they had learned.
 - *I got to read the essays.

What an education that was for me!

-More than one student wrote:

#They had seen correctional officers carrying guns.

*The kids probably would have called them guards.

*But I called them correctional officers (COs).

#There are no guns in jail.

*If the correctional officers had guns.

+Inmates would soon have guns.

*When outsiders expressed concern for my safety.

+I would tell them:

= "I think jail is one of the safest places to be."

- "Because there are no guns there."

#But these children were convinced they had seen guns.

*Influenced perhaps by:

+TV.

+Their own imaginations.

#Some of these children were not very good witnesses.

*To what they had seen.

-When the students had asked me:

"What is the hardest thing you have to do?"

*I had told them:

+ "The hardest thing for me to do: "

= "Is to go into a courtroom."

- "During the penalty phase of a capital murder trial."

= "Ask a jury not to kill someone."

#More than one student wrote:

* "Hardest thing the chaplain does is to kill people."

#That was certainly sobering for me.

*As a chaplain.

*As a pastor.

+To think that people could hear:

=Exact opposite of what I had said.

#When I asked some of the teachers at Josh's school about this.

*They said:

+ "Well, penalty phase, capital murder trial."

+ "These are foreign concepts to them."

+ "They don't know how to spell some of these words."

*I said:

+ "I can understand some vocabulary words might be a problem."

+ "But what about the word 'not'."

= "Not kill."

+ "Surely they know how to spell 'not'."

- #Some of these children were not very good witnesses.
- *To what they had seen.
- *To what they had heard.

I. John The Baptizer Was Sent By God To Be A Witness.

A. Have You Ever Been Called To Be A Witness?

1. I have.
2. I'm sure I told you.
 - a. When I left the St. Louis County Jail.
 - One of my going away presents.
 - #Was a subpoena.
 - *From the Federal District Court.
 - *To testify in the penalty phase.
 - +Of a capital murder trial.
 - =Man who had been in jail for a couple of years.
 - =Man whom I had baptized.
 - b. So 6-8 weeks after I moved to Tulsa.
 - Feds flew me back to St. Louis.
 - #Put me up in a hotel downtown.
 - When the defendant had a diabetic blackout.
 - #I had to stay.
 - *Extra day.
 - *Extra night.
 - #I spent the extra evening.
 - *Watching my first Cardinal baseball game.
 - +In the new Busch Stadium.
 - *"In all things God works for good."
 - +Romans 8:28.
 - c. When I got on the stand.
 - First thing I was asked.
 - #My name.
 - #My profession.
 - I said:
 - #"My name is Norman Dake."
 - #"I'm pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Tulsa, OK."

B. What Kind Of A Witness Was John?

1. He was asked a similar question.
 - a. By the priests and Levites.
 - Who had been sent by the Pharisees in Jerusalem.
 - b. "Who are you?"

2. John gave a most peculiar answer.
 - a. "I am not the Messiah?"
 - There's that little word "not" again.
 - b. When he was asked:
 - "Are you Elijah?"
 - #John said:
 - *"I am not."
 - "Are you the prophet?"
 - #Not a prophet.
 - #But the prophet.
 - *Meaning the "prophet like Moses."
 - +Deuteronomy 18: 15.
 - #John said, "No."
 - c. It would be like you asking me who I am.
 - I answer by telling you who I am not.
 - # "I'm not Jim Harris."
 - # "I'm not the organist."
3. What is going on in John's revelation of who he is not?
 - a. At our Wednesday evening Advent service.
 - I told you about God's encounter with Moses.
 - #In the burning bush.
 - *Exodus 3.
 - When God wants to send Moses to Egypt.
 - #To tell the pharaoh.
 - *"Let my people go."
 - Moses protests and says:
 - # "Pharaoh isn't going to let those people go on my say so."
 - # "Whom shall I say sent me?"
 - God says:
 - # "Tell him 'I AM' sent you."
 - # "I am 'I AM'."
 - b. In John's Gospel.
 - Jesus reveals his divine status.
 - #With those famous 'I AM' statements.
 - *"I AM the bread of life."
 - +John 6: 35, 41, 48.
 - *"I AM the light of the world."
 - +John 8: 12; 9: 5.
 - *"I AM the gate."
 - +John 10: 7, 9.
 - *"I AM the good shepherd."
 - +John 10: 11, 14.
 - *"I AM the vine."
 - +John 15: 1, 5.

*"I AM the way, the truth, and the life."
 +John 14: 6.
 *"I AM the resurrection and the life."
 +John 11: 25.
 *"Before Abraham was, I AM."
 +John 8: 58.
 -Jesus is the "I AM."
 -John is the "I am not."
 #John came to testify about the light.
 *Jesus.
 #But he is not the light.
 *John 1: 7-8.

II. John Is The Voice.

A. What Do You Think Of When You Think About The Voice?

1. I think about:
 - a. James Earl Jones.
 - Actor
 - Voice of Darth Vader.
 - The Voice.
 - b. Harry Kalas.
 - Sportscaster in Philadelphia.
 - Voice of NFL Films.
 - #Joe Buck.
 - *Sportscaster for Fox.
 - *Said of Harry Kalas:
 - + "If I had a voice like Harry Kalas,
 I would stay at home in a room by myself
 and listen to myself talk."
2. I couldn't think of a female example.
 - a. Kate Smith.
 - b. Phyllis Diller.
 - #Had distinctive voices.
 - #But I can't bring myself to think of them as "The Voice."
3. John the Baptizer is The Voice.
 - a. Not because of the distinctive sound he made.
 - #With his vocal cords.
 - b. But because of what he had to say.
 - #Content of his message.

- B. John Provided Testimony.
 - 1. Kind of like in a courtroom.
 - a. Who is on trial?
 - b. It appears that John is on trial.
 - 2. Religious establishment in Jerusalem.
 - a. Pharisees.
 - b. Experts in ritual purification.
 - Ask John:
 - # "Why are you baptizing?"
 - # "If you are not: "
 - * "Messiah."
 - * "Elijah."
 - * "The prophet."
 - # "Why are you baptizing?"
 - 3. John answers in a most peculiar way.
 - a. He doesn't say:
 - "God sent me."
 - "I'm just following orders."
 - "I'm just doing my job."
 - b. Instead he uses the question as an opportunity to testify.
 - To the light.
 - To the Word.
 - To the mightier one.
 - To the one whose shoe strings John isn't worthy to tie.
 - #Or untie.
 - #Slave's job.
 - To the one who is "I AM."

III. What Kind Of Testimony Can We Provide?

- A. We Might See Ourselves As Among The "I Am Not"s.
 - 1. I am not:
 - a. Messiah.
 - b. Elijah.
 - c. Prophet like Moses.
 - 2. I am not:
 - a. John the Baptizer.
 - b. Pastor.
 - c. Evangelism committee.
 - 3. What can I say?

#On one such occasion.

*Sunday dinner was finished.

*It was a nice day.

+Adults were still chatting around the dinner table.

+Rest of us were outside.

=House was here.

=Tree swing was over there.

=Horseshoe pit was in between.

*My three-year-old sister was swinging on the swing.

+When she decided to go back into the house.

=Right through the horseshoe pit.

=She caught a horseshoe in the back of the head.

#I had this memory.

*My sister's bloody head being wrapped in kitchen towels.

*Driving into town.

+First to the doctor's office.

=Which, of course, was closed on Sunday.

+Then to the local hospital.

=Which wasn't equipped to handle her head injury.

*Finally driving to the University Hospital.

+In Des Moines.

=Where my sister was admitted.

=She stayed for several days.

#Several years ago.

*I retold that story in the presence of my dad.

*My dad got this puzzled look on his face.

+He looked at me and said:

= "You weren't there."

= "We left you and Phil with such-and-such a family."

#I had fabricated my memory.

*I saw her get hit in the head with the horseshoe.

+At least I think I saw it happen.

+At any rate, my sister did get her head split open.

*But I hadn't gone to the hospital with my mom and dad.

+I had created a memory out of no memory.

=Perhaps out of bits and pieces of the story.

-I had heard my parents tell.

#If we are not (that word again) continually:

*In the light.

*In the Word.

+Worship.

+Bible study.

+5x5 small groups.

+Personal devotions.

- *We can fabricate things that aren't true.
- +Out of bits and pieces we thought we heard.
 - =From someone else.
- +Because we haven't read the book for ourselves.

4. We may be witnesses.
 - a. Like some of those first and second graders.
 - In Josh's elementary school.
 - b. Testifying to things:
 - We didn't really see.
 - We didn't really hear.

Concl: So God continually:

- Calls us back into the light.
 - #To see the light.
 - *Christ child born.
 - *Savior raised.
- Calls us back into the Word.
 - #So that we can be witnesses.
 - #So that we can testify.
 - *To the light.
 - *To the Word.
 - *To the one who is "I AM."
 - #So that all might believe through him.
 - *John 1:7

