

Pastor Jon's December 13, 2020 Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent.

Text: John 1

“A Light No Darkness Can Overcome”

Thanks to several of you suggesting it, we finally got to see the Celebration of Lights in Oshkosh on Friday. Many others also had the same idea around 8:30 at night on Friday. Our 4 year-old loved the person jumping in the pool and coming out cold. There is just something about lights piercing through the darkness as we approach the darkest day of the year on December 21... the Winter Solstice.

As a rebuke to the darkness, literally and metaphorically, people are decorating more than ever this year with Christmas lights... it is a visual sense of hope that the light brings.

In our Gospel for today, John the Baptist is testifying to the light that was coming into the world. The prologue of John's Gospel starts off... in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life. And the life was the light of all people. He is the light that no darkness can overcome.

John's whole purpose was to point to the light that is Jesus. John's job was as a witness to testify to Jesus so that others may believe. The Greek word for Witness is Martyr. We know that witnessing takes some risk and time.

You are witnesses to Jesus as well. The litmus test of belief in Jesus in John's Gospel is to be a witness. The woman at the well is a good example in chapter 4. After Jesus accepted her as is and promised her living water that springs up to eternal life, she ran and told the whole village about the man who knew everything about her questionable past and still offered grace.

Here are some examples of the witnessing I have seen at Our Savior's during the pandemic:

We had to learn how to do online worship, Bible studies, Sunday School, and confirmation.

We held outdoor worship and drive-in worship as a worship team.

We held a Zoom book study on anti-racism.

We had our first Chili-to-Go meal on Election Day raising money for local, national, and global missions.

We continued to serve meals for Pillars when other organizations were dropping out.

We packed and sent Lutheran World Relief school and health kits and quilts.

We started an ‘encouragement ministry’ of writing cards to people to keep on keeping on.

We put up the manger scene out front and put new lights on it. It makes me happy every time I drive by.

We delivered 30 poinsettias to homebound folks, thanks to the Hogenson family. I dropped Elaine Anderson’s poinsettia off at Dennis and Marsha Anderson’s house, and while Dennis was on the phone with Social Security, he said, “The church has been wonderful... sending cards.”

Ashley Stevenson has continued her baking ministry by taking the chocolate chip challenge and sharing her goodies with neighbors, family, friends, and lonely people. I then found out she has been doing this for years. She is also baking for our Pillar’s shelter meal.

Your financial giving has been a witness to me. As a result, we are positioning ourselves well for the future and will be burning our mortgage in 2020.

Finally, two members asked if I knew any families in need. We are partnering with Shattuck Middle School’s counselor to identify families in need and they will be distributing gift cards to families from our church.

These are just the things that came to mind recently. You are also witnessing in your jobs and in your homes.

I love John's response to the question, "Who are you?" John knew his purpose. To testify to the light of the world. He is comfortable in his own skin. His ego is in check. He knows his mission and his identity. In a world where our identity and worth are often derived from what people think of us or say about us, John knew his job. It was to prepare people to meet Jesus and believe in him. That's our job too as Christians and as the church.

In John's Gospel, we learn that Jesus is the light of the world. That he is the good shepherd and the bread of life. He will quench their deepest hungers and longings. He is the resurrection and life. The way the truth and the life.

Just like John the Baptist, who started his ministry on the margins of society in the wilderness, Jesus will begin his public ministry on the margins and heal them, comfort them, feed them, restore justice to them.

We too are called to be like John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus through our words and deeds.