

Toetrede

Liturgie van die Lig

Ik vind niet altijd zo gemakkelijk
de juiste woorden, Heer.
Kijk in mijn hart
en zie daar mijn hunkering naar vrede.
Zorg voor mij, Heer.
Ik weet zeker
dat Gij mij altijd nabij zijt.

Woorddiens

Lesing 1: Johannes 1:6-8 en 19-28 (1953)

⁶ Daar was 'n man van God gestuur, wie se naam Johannes was.

⁷ Hy het tot 'n getuienis gekom om van die lig te getuig, sodat almal deur hom sou glo.

⁸ Hy was nie die lig nie, maar hy moes van die lig getuig.

¹⁹ En dit is die getuienis van Johannes, toe die Jode uit Jerusalem priesters en Leviete gestuur het om hom te vra: Wie is u?

²⁰ En hy het erken en nie ontken nie, maar het erken: Ek is nie die Christus nie.

²¹ Toe vra hulle hom: Wat dan? Is u Elía? En hy sê: Ek is nie. Is u die profeet? En hy antwoord: Nee.

²² Toe sê hulle vir hom: Wie is u? — dat ons antwoord kan gee aan die wat ons gestuur het. Wat sê u van uself?

²³ Hy antwoord: Ek is die stem van een wat roep in die woestyn: Maak die pad van die Here reguit! soos Jesaja, die profeet, gesê het.

²⁴ En die wat gestuur was, was uit die Fariseërs.

²⁵ En hulle vra hom en sê vir hom: Waarom doop u dan as u nie die Christus of Elía of die profeet is nie?

²⁶ Johannes antwoord hulle en sê: Ek doop met water, maar onder julle staan Hy vir wie julle nie ken nie —

²⁷ dit is Hy wat ná my kom, wat voor my geword het, wie se skoenriem ek nie waardig is om los te maak nie.

²⁸ Dit het gebeur in Betábara, oorkant die Jordaan, waar Johannes besig was om te doop.

Broodjies vir die Pad

- Net zoals Johannes, word ook ik gezonden door God. Ik ben belangrijk voor God! Nu bid ik om inzicht in de wijze waarop God verlangt dat ik getuigenis afleg van Jezus en zijn evangelie in deze wereld.
- Is er iemand die mij beschouwt als een getuige van het licht door de wijze waarop ik in het leven sta? Ik luister naar Jezus als Hij mij vertelt dat ik gemaakt ben om het licht van de wereld te zijn. Ik vraag nederig dat Hij mij meer inzicht zou

schenken. Mogelijks vraag ik Hem om zijn handen op mijn hoofd te leggen en mij te zegenen, opdat ik het licht nog meer zou kunnen laten schijnen. (GR)



Hope rides on the decision either to believe that God stands on this dark road waiting to walk with us toward new light again or to despair of the fact that God who is faithful is eternally faithful and will sustain us in our darkness one more time.

~ Joan Chittister



In her memoir called *Mighty Be Our Powers* (2011), the Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee describes how one night she had her own dream while sleeping on her office floor: "I didn't know where I was. Everything was dark. I couldn't see a face, but I heard a voice, and it was talking to me— commanding me: 'Gather the women to pray for peace!'" At 5 A.M. she woke up shaking, feeling like she had heard the voice of God.

Peace was a distant dream for Liberians after fourteen years of savage civil war (1989–2003). By some estimates, ten percent of the population had been slaughtered. Twenty-five percent had fled the country. Starvation, systematic rape, torture, mutilation and Charles Taylor's cocaine-crazed child soldiers had traumatized the nation. Schools and hospitals closed. Rats and dogs ate the unburied dead who littered the streets. There was no water, electricity or phone service.

Later that morning Gbowee related her dream to the women at her Lutheran church. Sister Esther Musah, an evangelist, led them in prayer: "Dear God, thank you for sending us this vision. Give us your blessing, Lord, and offer us Your protection and guidance in helping us to understand what it means." What it meant was the start of the Liberian women's peace movement that ended the civil war.

About twenty Lutheran women began to gather every Tuesday at noon to pray. Sometimes they fasted. They invited other Christian churches. At one meeting Asatu spoke up: "I'm the only Muslim here, and we want to join this peace movement." "Praise the Lord!" shouted the Christian women. And so Muslim and Christian women formed an alliance. They shared their horror stories. Training sessions and workshops followed. They passed out brochures and marched to city hall. Three days a week for six months they visited the mosques, the markets, and the churches of Monrovia: "Liberian women, awake for peace!"

In the end, the women forced Charles Taylor to peace talks in Ghana, and then in Ghana they barricaded the do-nothing men in their plenary hall until they signed peace accords. After the 2003 accords, they were instrumental in disarming the country, registering voters, and electing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first woman head of state in Africa.

Who were these women? "I will say," says Gbowee, "they are ordinary mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters." They sowed bitter tears. They went out weeping. And they acted on their dreams of peace, joy, and laughter for their beloved country.

See Leymah Gbowee, with Carol Mithers, [*Mighty Be Our Powers, A Memoir: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War*](#) (New York: Beast Books, 2011), 246pp. For a film version of the Liberian women's peace movement see the documentary film [*Pray the Devil Back to Hell*](#) (available on Netflix streaming). (JwJ)



This Sunday of Advent directs our attention not to anticipation to the birth of Jesus but to what John Caputo calls, "Messianic time."

In his self-described "Michelin's guide to Jacques Derrida," *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, John Caputo cites "Messiah" or its derivatives on 89 of his 339 pages of text, from page 1 to page 338. "Messianic time," he writes, "is prophetic time, the time to come, that disturbs the present with the call for justice, which calls the present beyond ... itself. For the most unjust thing of all would be to close off the future by saying that justice is present, that the present time is just...." (p. 81) But just before this passage, he makes the same move as Isaiah when he writes, "Justice means doing justice, doing the truth... in order that he might come, in order to bring about messianic time, the epoche of the Messiah." (loc cite) "The Messiah is already among you," John the Baptist insists.

Caputo concludes, "...justice is precisely unseeable and unforeseeable...." "Justice does not reside high above but settles into the flesh of the least among us, pitching its tent among us. Justice is not above but urgently required here and now, even as it is something you press forward to with passion, with prophetic and messianic fire... with a fiercely burning ruah, something to come, something impossible, unimaginable, unrepresentable, something with which you must keep faith, the passion of faith...." (p. 338) (SacraC)



In the introduction to *An Uncommon Lectionary*, Butcher comments on the pivotal significance of this event in the life of Jesus:

The liturgical year in this lectionary begins with the primary spiritual event in the life of Jesus: his Baptism by John in the Jordan River. Mark, the earliest narrative Gospel, opens with the ministry of John the Baptizer who is "calling for baptism and a change of heart that lead to forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4, SV)

According to Luke 3:23, Jesus was about thirty when he went to hear John preach. What might there have been in John's message that prompted Jesus to ask for baptism? And what might have he experienced during his baptism and the forty days in the wilderness that reportedly followed? Might the baptism in the Jordan and the time in the desert comprise a story illustrating his enlightenment?

The evidence is clear that something profound happened within Jesus which provided direction and energy for a ministry of teaching and healing.

Without Jesus' baptism, there might have been no ministry, no getting into trouble with the authorities, no crucifixion, no resurrection experiences, no church, no Christian religion, and no church history! The course of human civilization would have gone quite differently.

Brood vir die Pad

In October, a newly formed Right to Life group sponsored a week-long conference, entitled "Abortion and Feminism," on the campus of Yale Divinity School. The pro-choice posters posted by the Students for Reproductive Justice made it clear that seminarians are not of one mind on the issue.

I watched the rising tensions with great interest. A theologically grounded pro-choice position has long been of great importance to me, an important tenet of the Reformed theology that I hold dear. I was glad to see students who share my perspective lifting their voices in the public realm.

But just when the tension around these disagreements seemed most fierce, I entered the chapel one morning for the 10:30 a.m. worship service. A Taizé service had been planned for the day, and the congregational singing had begun by the time I arrived. All of the chairs in the space had been removed, replaced by long, blue floor cushions. And there, across the chapel from where I was seated, sat the leaders of the two opposing sides in the abortion debate, both with eyes closed, both moved by the Taizé chant that filled the sanctuary.

I don't know if they talked together after the service. But it was clear to me that when our eyes and our hearts are focused on the holy in our midst, we lower our defenses a bit. Perhaps we share no more than a song. And perhaps, a bit more tolerance and some sense of mutuality begins to inform our spirits.

[As I say in my Century lectionary column](#) for this week, John the Baptist is most troubling to those who imagine that they alone are the rightful bearers of the light. If Advent is truly a time of preparing to celebrate the birth of God made flesh in Jesus, then these must be days to renew our willingness to be vulnerable to all of the ways that God is speaking in our lives. Even if it just means sitting at the side of someone who we think has got it all wrong. Even if it just means 30 minutes of shared prayer.

Wegsending

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