

12.13.20 A3 Called to Testify to the Light

- So can you guess what the American companies Baker's Chocolate, King Arthur Flour, Cigna Insurance, Dixon Ticonderoga pencils, and Jim Beam distillery have in common?
 - They were all founded either before or right after the American Revolution
 - They are OLD companies!
 - But they are not as old as England's Hampton ferry, Italy's Baretta firearms, and Cambridge University's press which are at least twice as old as these
 - But then there is a little restaurant in Japan named Ichiwa which has been owned and run by the same family for 1020 years!
 - It was founded in the year 1000, at least by our calendar
- This little Japanese restaurant has just one specialty on the menu – rice flour cakes, and if you want something to drink with your rice cake, they will serve you green tea [NYTimes 12.3.20]
- I don't know about you, but I find that to be AMAZING! How did they stay in business so long?
 - It's simple, they do one thing and they do it very well
 - They have kept the same recipe, and have only recently starting pounding the rice with a machine, instead of by hand
 - They value their community, their employees, and their neighbors
 - And they have prioritized the long view; the VERY long view over fast profits or fads, and in fact they recently turned down an offer to allow Uber Eats to deliver their sweet rice cakes
 - This family views their work as a calling, and they pass down not just the recipe, but they also pass down the company values down from one generation to another
 - And the number one value is simply to carry on for the next generations
- 1020 years is a long time for a company, but that's only about half as old as the church
- The church has been around for almost 2000 years now, and as I thought about it, the church shares something in common

with that little Japanese Rice cake restaurant, and today's gospel reading from the Gospel of John gives us a big, bold clue

- Listen to these words from just six verses into the book of John: “⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. [1:6-8]”
- John, that is John the Baptizer, had one simple purpose in his ministry – not to be the light, not to overshadow the light, but to be a witness who testified to the light
- And that light to which John testified, witnessed, and pointed was Jesus Christ
- Everything we read or hear after that in the Gospel of John is simply John proclaiming and amplifying the message that Jesus Christ the light of the world
 - In a world that John the Baptizer called dark, he promised his listeners that the true light of the world was coming into it.
 - Jesus soon arrived, he called disciples, he fed thousands of listeners not only with his teaching, but he also had compassion on them when they were hungry
 - So Jesus took, blessed and broke a few loaves and fish, and then fed a whole multitude of hungry people right there and then
 - He also walked on water, raised the dead, and headed to Jerusalem
 - Then finally, like the sacrificial lamb who long before had been a sign for death to pass over the Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt, Jesus the light of the world and the lamb of God died on the cross to force death's hand – Jesus forced death's dark hand so that darkness and death would pass over us, and so that new life might be gifted to us and the world by the lamb who was slain and who now promises to pour light and love out on us and the world
 - Remember that little Japanese restaurant? It is interesting – that 1020 year-old restaurant was started long ago near a Buddhist shrine during a pandemic 1000 years ago, in order to feed people who were coming there

to pray, and then to continue feeding generation of people generation after generation of who have come there to pray

- That call to testify to the light, that call to bear witness to the light, that call to point to light of God in the midst of the world's darkness has also been passed down from John through generation after generation, and now to us
 - You know, when the economy is roaring, when the world is somewhat at peace, and when we choose not to listen to the muffled cries of those who still suffer, we can be seduced into thinking that the world is a bright and wonderful place
 - But if anything, this terrible pandemic that the whole world is going through right now reminds us on both a personal level and a global level, that the world is really a broken place
 - In John's words, the world is dark
 - But... BUT, we have been called and entrusted by God with one enduring value – one enduring message to remember for ourselves and to witness and testify to others... and that is the nearly 2000 year-old Good News that has endured through the darkness of wars, famines holocausts, and past and even present pandemics... Jesus Christ the crucified and risen light of the world is even now at work to illumine the world and to love it and us back into life