

John testified

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John the Baptist has been our constant companion on the journey through Advent and into Epiphany. First, it was his task to make ready the way of the Lord. Next, it was his privilege to baptize Jesus in the river Jordan. Now, it is his purpose to bear witness to Jesus' identity, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Of all the duties appointed to him, testimony may be the most significant one. John's testimony begins with a confession. Even though he had preached about one coming who was greater than he, John twice confesses, "I myself did not know him." Only when the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism does John finally recognize Jesus as the Son of God. With this personal revelation, the meaning of John's ministry becomes clear to him. He came baptizing so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel. He is to point to the Lamb of God so that others like Andrew and Simon will follow.

The beauty of personal testimony is its honesty. John says, in so many words, "Look! It's the Lamb of God. I didn't really recognize him at first, but I will tell you about my experience, how I came to know him in my life." As Andrew and Simon discover, Jesus will be revealed to them in completely different ways. They will have to "come and see" for themselves, and they will have their own stories to tell about how they came to know and to love the Lamb of God. Personal testimonies are powerful because they speak through the particular circumstances of our lives. They tell of the variety of ways that we fail to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, and the ways in which, despite our failures, Jesus makes himself known to us anyway.

But how can we truly testify to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world when we don't also speak about the ways in which he removes our sins?

The problem with personal testimony is the same as its strength: testimony must be honest. It is John's recognition of his failure that facilitates the revelation of God in Jesus. Personal testimony is powerful because it starts with our sin, ends in our salvation, and thus facilitates the revelation of God in Jesus.

In *Speaking of Sin*, Barbara Brown Taylor laments the loss of the language of sin and salvation within the mainline church. "Abandoning the language of sin will not make sin go away. Human beings will continue to experience alienation, deformation, damnation, and death no matter what we call them. Abandoning the language will simply leave us speechless before them, and increase our denial of their presence in our lives."

John the Baptist testified to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Therefore we are not left speechless.