

PRAY Jesus,
thank you for teaching us
to remember what's truly
important in our lives.
Help us not lose sight of
the real meaning of this
season. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Advent



December 13, 2020, Vol. 33, No. 11

SPiRIT



Who do you see LIVING the spirit of Advent?



Witness to the LIGHT

by Ellie Roscher

Almost immediately upon arriving home from 11 days in El Salvador, Brian Smith and all 15 other students were experiencing the paralyzing feeling of reverse culture shock. We were in daily email contact until we could meet again.

"We have so much," Francie said. "It's hard not to feel guilty."

"Now that we're back, El Salvador is like another world," added Akoni.

"What do we do? What do we feel?" we all asked.

That's when Brian Smith shared a few raps he had written about our trip.

*So simple and how it can be
How open our hearts can be
How open my mind can see*

His words resonated with us. Since then, I have been his teacher, slowly piecing together his story and seeing him take the risks a prophet takes among us.

"I was a mischievous child, maybe even a troubled child. I talked back," says Brian, independent and strong-minded. "I got chased by the cops for throwing things at cars and getting my friends to do the same. I always outran them," he remembers with a laugh.

"Being the youngest of five I was always surrounded by older kids. I learned from them and their mistakes. I decided that I wanted to bring positive things into the world."

*Lookin' at these trees, reminds me of my life
Branch by branch connects values to be right
Contemplating on which path to follow
Each leads a different way
Might not be there tomorrow
Then I'll grow to be a full out man
Livin' life is hard, I'll do the best I can
Knowing that I'm gonna need help*

Brian needs to express himself and be in communities that let him. Music is his medium. "By seventh grade, I knew I wanted to make music," he says. "I was born with a drive to create. People ask me if it is scary to make music, but I'm never afraid. I start with a sample, and I just explode. I feel validation and relief as what is in me comes out to share with others."

Raised on 2Pac, Chuck D, and Notorious B.I.G., Brian got tired of rappers addressing nothing more than money, drugs, and women repeatedly in their lyrics. "I want to do something different. I want my music to mean something," Brian says.



Luckily, Brian has found local rappers that feed his creativity. A cohort of artists that call themselves Rhymesayers influence Brian's music the most, especially Atmosphere and Brother Ali. "I want to be a speaker of truth and a storyteller like them," he says.

*Make a good impact, preach, enhance
Who says you need to be a certain color
To be part of, be yourself, look further
Maybe then they'll see
How good it feels to open myself and be me
There're other people in this world?
Got it right
Stop being fake and go do
what you're born to*

Friends dropped Brian in ninth grade when they started drinking and he didn't give in to peer pressure. "I didn't need that," says Brian. "I am a wild and fun guy, and I don't need alcohol to be funny. So we broke up, the guys and me. I was really lonely for a while. But it was worth it to be true to myself and just be me."

Brian turned to music and sports to keep busy. "I worked to be the major wide receiver on our team. I worked and worked, and then when I caught a pass for a touchdown in a big game, it was like, 'Yeah, I did that.'"



SUNDAY GOSPEL

3rd Sunday of Advent

A bright light in the darkness

NARRATOR 1: There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

NARRATOR 2: He came as a witness that he might testify about the light, so that all might believe through him.

NARRATOR 1: He himself was not the light but gave witness to the light.

NARRATOR 2: This is the witness John gave when Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask this question:

LEVITES: Who are you?

JOHN THE BAPTIST: I am not the Messiah.

PRIESTS: Who are you then? Are you Elijah?

JOHN THE BAPTIST: I am not.

LEVITES: Are you the prophet?

JOHN THE BAPTIST: No.

PRIESTS: Tell us who you are so that we can give some answer to those who sent us. What do you say for yourself?

JOHN THE BAPTIST: As the prophet Isaiah said, "I am a voice in the desert crying out, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

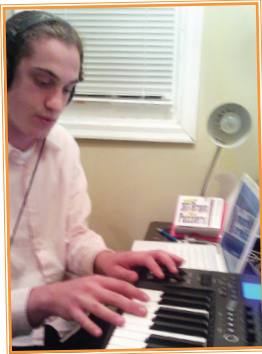
NARRATOR 1: Some of the questioners were Pharisees.

PHARISEES: If you are not the messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet, why do you baptize?

JOHN THE BAPTIST: I baptize with water. One stands among you whom you do not recognize—the one who is to come after me—the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten.

NARRATOR 2: This happened in Bethany across the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

John 1.6-8,19-28



"Music is the same. I build and build until something is there I never thought I could create. A moment always comes in the creating process when I don't believe the song

will ever happen. Then it does. There is dignity in taking that risk. I like sports and I'm proud of my accomplishments, but sports don't define me. I don't pray for it, you know? But music is me."

Among his peers Brian has become a kind of prophet, someone who has words for their feelings and dreams, who takes the risk to use his talents and perform, and lives what he sings. He is a witness to God's gifts within him because those around him see his light. He has a drive to create in a way that brings justice.

The first time Brian rapped live he spoke to a group of kids at a low-achieving grade school. His words spoke the power of education and the need to stay in school.

"Music is my way to say the person you were created to be is good. Find your people, do your thing, and be true to yourself in the world—these are the best things. It is worth being lonely while you are searching."

*So me? Just a skinny white guy
Seen' my friend dealin' just to get by
Things will get better only if we try
I'm a work on myself to be a better
Bri*

Finding who he is and creating music are spiritual processes for Brian. "Religion is the idea that there is a greater good—life is not about me. I want to add what I can to this greater good. If we all do a better job of that, the world will get more beautiful. I just want people to believe that they can be happy when they are themselves."

In a sea of young people working to identify who God created them to be, Brian has emerged as a leader through his music and how he lives his life. What draws others is his pureness of heart, his work ethic, and his uncompromising dedication to staying true to himself. Brian Smith raps truth because he sings what he lives.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the light to which Brian Smith is a witness?
- 2 What risks do you take to use your God-given gifts? To create?
- 3 What choices have cost you friends?
- 4 Who in your school challenges you to be yourself and make a better world?
- 5 How can young people be prophets to each other?
- 6 What is the light to which John the Baptist witnesses?
- 7 What do you say for yourself as a Christian—who are you? To what do you witness?

*So I wonder why does it take so long
For me to get the answer
and start feeling strong
Them healing hands
were part of your sacrifice
Leaves me with the question,
will I be safe tonight?
Always go to you, to get me through
Can I realize, did you feel like this too?
Son, Prophet, and world creator
Should I feel guilt
for terror round the equator?
I guess I won't know until
the day I die
I gotta say I love you*

Listen to the prophets among us.

December can be a crazy time of year. The semester is winding down and school is starting to get old. Winter sports are gearing up. The days are short and the nights long.

In the North, the breathtaking cold creates a feeling of vulnerability. There always seems to be too much to do and not enough time to get it done. Pre-Christmas advertising hits fever pitch, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed — or just tune out Christmas until we have time to think about it.

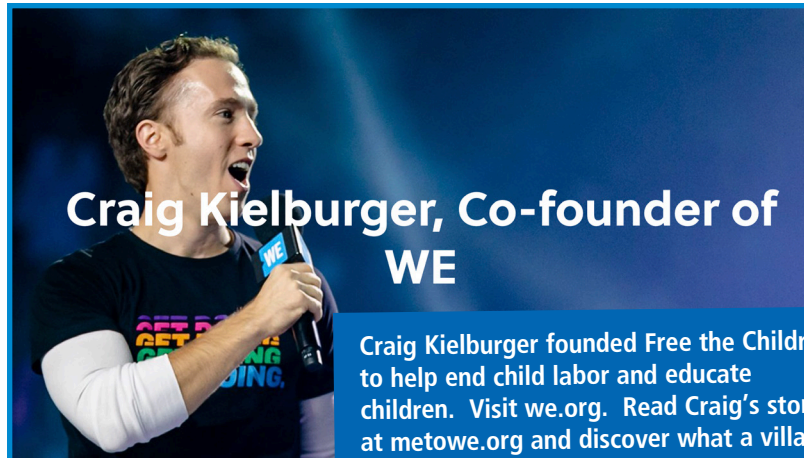
Advent is the Church's antidote to the craziness of the season. Advent reminds us to slow down, take a deep breath, and find a quiet space in our lives. Advent invites us to join the shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem — BEFORE the angels arrived.

There they were, camped out under the stars — no televisions, no radios, no cell phones, no teachers, no coaches, no deadlines. Just a handful of people and flocks of woolly animals, dozing in utter darkness.

John the Baptist's words remind us to reflect on who we are and how we are prophets to one another.

In the Old Testament a prophet speaks for God to the king and people. A prophet speaks and acts publicly, putting his or her life on the line to deliver a message people and their leaders don't always want to

Give an alternative Christmas gift. Give a family an animal and a better future by using the Heifer International gift catalog (heifer.org).



Craig Kielburger, Co-founder of WE

Craig Kielburger founded Free the Children to help end child labor and educate children. Visit we.org. Read Craig's story at metowe.org and discover what a village chief taught him by calling a minga.

Send a greeting to your representatives in Congress. Thank them for supporting something you value or for working on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

hear. Usually the message includes a call to be faithful to God and care for the poor.

In Jesus' time and today a prophet sees, judges, and acts and urges hearers to do the same.

A prophet observes and listens to what is happening in the world.

John the Baptist sees people of his time superficially observing God's law but not really opening their hearts. Craig Kielburger heard the story of another 12 year old like himself who was sold as a child laborer and had to act. In our cities prophets see a lack of affordable housing, one child in five hungry, a disproportionate number of people of color in prison.

A prophet makes judgments about these situations. A prophet evaluates homelessness or hunger in the light of the gospels and draws conclusions about what must happen to treat people with dignity. What does Jesus in the gospels ask us to do in our world?

A prophet acts to bring about justice. Sometimes the action is personal. I give money, volunteer, or change my lifestyle. To change an unjust system, I join others who lobby to build more affordable housing, end the death penalty, provide

decent health care for everyone. I work with Free the Children to end child labor and build schools in the developing world. The impact of my actions may be small, but joined with countless others across the globe, we can act to stem the tide of poverty and injustice

The Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets. Nicene Creed

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Brainstorm a list of modern-day prophets: musicians, teachers, scientists, politicians.
- 2 Write your own rap or poem expressing your feelings and dreams about being who you are. Perform them for your group.
- 3 Encourage your family or friends to simplify Christmas gift giving this year. Make a donation to an organization that helps those with fewer resources.