

"I couldn't keep it to myself!"

By [T. Denise Anderson](#)

December 3, 2015

*To receive these posts by e-mail each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Anderson's current *Living by the Word* column as well as past magazine and online-only content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Luke's Gospel gives us some wondrous glimpses into the life of John the Baptist. We have the compelling story of how his father, Zechariah, heard he'd soon be a daddy, disbelieved that revelation, and spent the entire pregnancy unable to speak.&

But when he is finally able to speak, he speaks! His prophecy over his son's life—"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins"—is among the most poetic and powerful portions of Luke's Gospel.

There's a song common in the black church tradition that says, "I said I wasn't gonna tell nobody, but I couldn't keep it to myself!" It speaks of the goodness of God and how impossible it is to keep such goodness a secret, never sharing it with anyone. After seeing a divine promise kept and fulfilled before his eyes, Zechariah, whose mouth was opened anew, just couldn't keep it to himself. Equally unable to remain silent was his son.

In the third chapter, we are dropped into the middle of the baptizer's ministry as he is proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His is the voice of which Isaiah speaks, preparing the way for the Lord, making straight the path. He is that loudmouth for the Lord, the one who can't shut up for his own good. And in that regard, I'm reminded of the affinity those of us who preach share with him.

I think also about testimony services in the black church and those souls who have so much to get off of their chests. None of it happens in a vacuum or for no reason. We have to tell somebody, because in telling somebody, we then see that somebody turn to God and away from something else. That's the point of testimony, sharing, and storytelling. We speak so that people and systems may be redeemed.

Silence has its place. It is good and necessary, but at times it can be dangerous. It's often when we're silent that evil persists. As Edmund Burke once said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." An equally famous quote from Zora Neale Hurston reads, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."

We've got to tell what we know. And tell it all! The good and the bad. What God has done and what we need to do. We tell it, speak it, say it so that God's will can be done on earth as it is in heaven. It's a gift to be able to tell it, to proclaim what God has done and is doing. And the miraculous and remarkable part of all of it is that we needn't do much more than open our mouths.

For those with something to say, I pray for the grace and courage to say it, so that the world in waiting may find its redemption.