

A good advertisement is a powerful thing.

Every year at Advent, we spend time talking about a man who functioned as a living advertisement for Jesus. His name is John. What's weird is, when John came, he broke just about every advertising rule there is. John didn't believe in fancy packaging as he turned people to Jesus. John had no supermodel to turn people to the message of salvation. He employed no famous athletes from the most recent Olympic games. John used no media campaign to 'go viral.' He relied on word of mouth to get the message out. But strangest of all, he didn't try to make people feel good. On the contrary, his message was uncomfortable. He said, "Change the direction of your life, because the kingdom of God is near."

At this time of year, right now, advertisers are telling you what they think Christmas is all about. They say Christmas is all about giving and they suggest you give the particular product they are selling. Others say Christmas is all about family and togetherness. Some say Christmas is all about staying in touch with friends, or volunteering somewhere, or just being kind.

That's where I imagine John would interrupt. He would step out of the River Jordan and tell us what Christ and Christmas are really about. With a powerful voice, he would tell us that what God did for us in sending His Son is not a temporary escape from the hard facts of this world. He would tell us that first, foremost and always, Jesus is how we can be saved from ourselves; saved from the devastating consequences of sin; saved from being separate from God forever. He would tell us to change the direction of our lives, (especially if I think the direction of my life is just fine). He would tell you to be ready for Jesus; to welcome Jesus; to put full trust in Jesus.

And then John would step aside. John stepped aside as the heavens opened and a voice proclaimed, "Jesus is My Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased." Then, even though John knew he would decrease in influence, even as Jesus would increase in importance, he went back to work (John 3:30). He kept pointing people to Jesus, the Lamb of God. He allowed his disciples to become Jesus' disciples. He sent a message that you still need to hear. By God's invitation, drop the sins you're carrying. Turn around and go in God's direction. Look for salvation from Jesus who fulfilled the prophecies for you. Look to Jesus who lived His entire life for you. Look to Jesus who kept all the laws for you. Look to Jesus who died for you. Look to Jesus, believe, and be saved. From before birth, until his death, that was the message of John, a living advertisement.

We need people like John, who are not afraid to stand outside of the mainstream and tell us the truth. We need people who are unashamed of the unusual message of Jesus; people who will point us to Jesus and then get out of His way.

But you know what else? We need to be those people. If you hear the message, "Change the direction of your life, because the kingdom of Jesus is near;" if you listen to it, and it convicts you, and you accept it; if you are refreshed by the forgiveness that comes spilling out of Jesus; if you want the gifts that only He can give, and believe that He has, in fact, given them to you, then your life becomes a living advertisement for Jesus. Let me say it again; if you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, your life is a living advertisement for him.

What do you think of that?

In these busy days leading up to Christmas, what message are you communicating to those around you?

Through what you say and how you say it, and what you do and how you do it, are you sending the message that Christmas is an exhausting marathon that must be endured, not enjoyed?

Are you sending the message that Christmas is a chance to get things that you want, and if you don't get them, there will be 'consequences'?

Are you sending the message that Christmas is basically time for fun; for time off; time during which you are not to be bothered?

Are you sending the message that you'd rather skip Christmas altogether?

In these busy days leading up to Christmas, what message are you communicating?

Are you sending the message that people and their problems matter more than completing your projects?

Are you sending the message that there is deep joy in remembering the birth of Jesus?

In these busy days leading up to Christmas, what is it that you are advertising?

And now, let me follow in John's footsteps. Let me get out of the way and point you to Jesus. In one sense, Jesus is coming. He could return as Judge and King at any time. Are you ready for that moment? Has the direction of your life changed to the degree that you are looking forward to seeing him?

In another sense, Jesus is here already. Where two or three people gather in His Name, He is there, which means He is here. His Words are here. Words of forgiveness, offered out of his excruciating sacrifice for you. Words that give life meaning. Words that make death and the devil powerless. Words that cause water to cleanse and adopt. Words that cause simple bread and wine to carry His body and blood to you. Words that create a community in this place. Words that build a kingdom of light in the middle of a dark world. He is here, now, and His love for you is real, and it is constant. Change direction. Humble yourself, clear a path to your heart, and let the King enter in.

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