

Smoky Mountain Reflections, July 2013

Where is Jesus??? In our world today, full of little churches and mega churches trying to sell you Jesus by saying 'Come over here, we have the Jesus you didn't even know you needed or wanted', how does one find the real Jesus? Well, first let's make a typically Lutheran statement..."you do not find Jesus He finds you!" That is all fine and good and true but not very helpful in responding to the constant barrage of trendy Jesus marketing. So let's briefly review the three main marketing tools used to sell you a Jesus that is really more about you than the Savior who came to save you. That is what marketing naturally does, appeals to the individual.

The first and most popular of the shallow self-centered versions of 'marketing Jesus' is the, "**Look at how good I feel Jesus**". This version of marketing Jesus is easy to identify. Followers talk about Jesus but Jesus is not really 'doing' the verbs. This version is referenced when the one who shares Him with you does not talk about what Jesus does for you but about how Jesus makes you feel. In truth, Jesus does not manipulate our emotions. How we feel is about us, not about Jesus. Emotions are a gift from God and yes, when we sing His praises or listen to or read His words or share how He has blessed us, it can and should make us feel good. But those feelings are not Jesus, they are not even an indication He is close to us. The one who bled and died for our sins is Jesus. What if I do not feel good, if I am grieving, if I am hungry, if I am sick? Does that mean Jesus is not with me? Quite to the contrary! When we need Him the most, He is there providing the peace He promised. So if someone tries to sell you a "**Look at how good I feel Jesus**" say no thanks and politely run away

The next version of marketing Jesus is the "**Look at all my stuff Jesus**". This version is also easy to identify. Followers tell you to 'look at all the great stuff Jesus gave me because I am a hard worker for the kingdom and He clearly rewards those who follow His laws and do His will'. This of course does not tell you about Jesus and what He did for you, it tells you how good this "believer" thinks he is. What if I am poor, if my car gets repossessed, if I lose my job or my home...in those cases, in this version, this false Jesus must not love you. The real Jesus came for, and loves and serves, all sinners and tax collectors. It does not matter what side of the track you come from. You know you are living right not if you are blessed with material things but if your activities reflect a redeemed life that seeks to love God and neighbor as best you can with His help. So if you meet someone selling this Jesus tell them you can't afford to pay the entry dues!

The last version of marketing Jesus is the "**Look at my degree Jesus**". This version of marketing Jesus is again easy to identify. This group tells you that they can prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is who He claims to be because they themselves are so learned. This is a ditch I often fall into because it sure would be nice to be able to prove God is who He claims to be. But you cannot prove God to anyone, only the Holy Spirit can create faith. And reason is but a maidservant to her mistress, faith. As long as the maidservant and the mistress sleep in their own beds they get along nicely. However if the maidservant tries to sleep in her mistress's bed....confusion and anarchy are sure to follow. So when your pastor says he can prove to you God exists, remind him that he cannot:-)

We have now identified the false Jesus marketing models. They have been over simplified here but they all prove that the great deceiver does his best to disguise falsehoods in a myriad of ways. How is this helpful? Or is it helpful in identifying where Jesus is? While it is helpful to know where Jesus is not, it is more helpful to know where He is. With the eyes of faith, it is as easy to see where He is as it is to find Waldo on a busy multicolored page. You know exactly what Waldo looks like. His candy cane shirt and hat, the glasses and blue jeans are unmistakable. The true Jesus might make you feel good, He will bless you but not necessarily with wealth, and science and history are His friend, but those things are not how you will know Him. You will know Him because He is where He says He will be in His word and sacraments. You can know with absolute certainty that you are a baptized child of God whom He loves more than His own life which He gave on a cross. He regularly nurtures you through His word proclaimed and His (body / bread) and (blood / wine) put in your mouth for your forgiveness. Take comfort in His assurance "**Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world**" Amen.

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