

Sermon online on Sunday 23 January 2022

by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Readings: Psalm 113 & Luke 4:14-21

A Manifesto Slogan

Marketing and politics: you may think that you have no interest in either subject, but they are two unavoidable ingredients of the modern world, not just in developed countries, but globally. Marketing campaigns help define the hopes and aspirations of consumer society; political parties use the same techniques to sell themselves to the people and define what they want to deliver to and for their voters.

Over the years, I have worked for (and with) a number of corporate companies and charities. With each one, sooner or later, someone at senior management level will say that, *'We have to address our brand values; we have to come up with a simple slogan that represents who we are and what we do as an organisation'*.

So, we engage expensive marketing and PR agencies and have numerous creative thought scatter sessions (the new name for a brainstorm), using slide presentations, flip charts and post-it notes, until the organisation settles on its chosen defining tag line. You know the kind of thing. Here are some examples, not from companies that I have worked for, I hasten to add, but ones that should be familiar to you. This sermon is like a pub quiz. Name that company:

- Just do it Nike (1987)
- Every little helps Tesco (1993)
- Say it with flowers Florists Telegraph Delivery Assoc (1917)
- It's the real thing Coca-Cola (1940)
- Never knowingly undersold John Lewis (1925)
- Working Together for Britain Liberal-SDP (1983)
- Keep calm and carry on HM Government (1939)

I'm sure you can think of many more.

Unfortunately, in modern times, many of us have come to distrust the slogans of both marketers and politicians. In our sceptical world, we see both as representing false promises, fake truth and self-interest.

It's easy to think that it's always been that way since civilisation began, but there have been some notable exceptions.

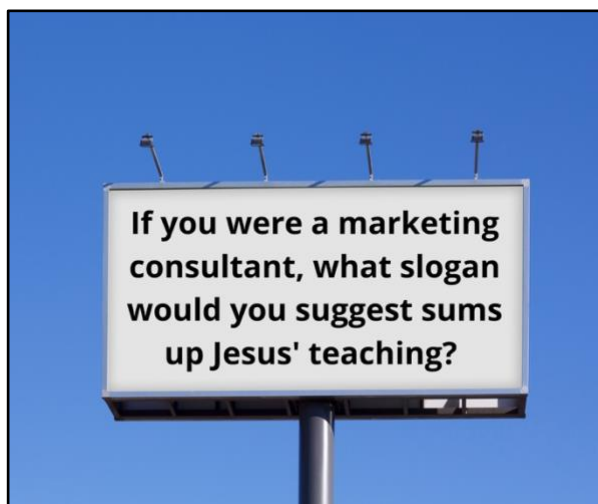
In this morning's gospel, we hear about the start of Jesus's ministry. He's been baptised; he's been blessed with the Holy Spirit, he's resisted temptation in the desert and now, here he is, back in his hometown, preaching for the first time in public about a new way of thinking and behaving. He's laying the foundations for what will become known as 'Christianity'.

He doesn't yet have a brand image or a slogan to define what he's preaching, but he does establish his manifesto by quoting one of the old prophets - Isaiah - which would have been familiar to his audience. He tells them of God's new plan for the old world... good news for the poor... release of the

captives... sight to the blind... the oppressed go free. It's heady stuff against a background of traditional Judaism.

And he goes one step further. If you read Mark's account of the same morning in the synagogue, Jesus is confronted by a man possessed by an unclean spirit - in other words, someone with mental health problems - someone who really shouldn't be in the synagogue at all under Jewish law, but Jesus engages with him and sets him free.

His manifesto says we should administer to the poor and afflicted, not just to the clean and pure. And he goes on to demonstrate this time and time again over the next three years by engaging with tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers and people with disabilities. He's going to walk the talk; he'll deliver on his promises.



So, Christ launches his manifesto. If you were a marketing consultant, what slogan would you suggest sums up his teaching?

It's got to be something that people can believe in; something that is active, that followers and party members and customers of the product can do themselves. Think of one word, one word that sums up Christianity, one four-letter word that captures the essence of God on earth.

I know what you're going to say. The obvious answer is L O V E.

That's ok and it has resonance and people understand it. But we're at the cutting edge of marketing, we have PowerPoint presentations and packs of post-it notes. We could come up with something more challenging; something that stretches the imagination.

I'm going to cheat here and borrow a thought from a book called *A Nazareth Manifesto*, written by Sam Wells, the vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields. He explains that there is an often neglected four-letter word in the Bible that describes the essence of who God is and his desire for us: the simple word is 'WITH'.

And you can see how this word is used throughout the New Testament to describe the essence of God's desire.

It describes why Jesus and the spirit of Christ engages **with** everyone, how he is **with** the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the lepers and people with disabilities; he is **with** the sick in the synagogue, he is **with** you, he is **with** me, he's **with** all of us.

I wonder if you've ever considered why Jesus didn't begin his public ministry until he was 30 years old? There are several good theological and cultural reasons why he might have waited so long. But could it also be because he simply enjoyed being with us; to live a life amongst the forgotten people of the tiny village of Nazareth; to spend so much of his

life not amongst the rich, the famous and religious, but living alongside farmers and carpenters.

Just being **with** people, understanding and experiencing the messiness of life. That's the Son of God for you.

So out of this morning's gospel and our impromptu marketing exercise, I give you a new slogan to take away and mull over. It's not '*Just do it*' or '*Every little helps*' or '*It's the real thing*', although any of those could be appropriate to Christianity. No, it's simply: *our God of love is **with**...* (dot dot dot) [ENTER WHATEVER NAME YOU LIKE HERE].

Amen

Inspiration from:

Hamish Bruce

St John & St Stephen's, Reading

Sermon: A Nazareth Manifesto (27.01.2019)

Revd Dr Sam Wells

St Martin-in-the-Fields, London

Book: A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God (2015)