

I have been reflecting on God’s strange message service. How or through whom God sends the message to us.

As marketing was my major in college, I enjoy analyzing the effect of the TV commercials, to see if their message is getting across. So what comes to mind it I say Tony the Tiger? Frosted Flakes that are g-r-r-reat. Who would think to put a fierce animal like a tiger, as a reminder to eat sugar coated smashed and dried corn? What would plant an idea like that in someone’s head? And yet since 1952, when Kellogg’s first came out with Frosted Flakes, Tony the Tiger has been the symbol of this cereal. Maybe it is the red ascot around his neck that makes him more approachable.

Who writes this stuff? And where does that inspiration come from? How can an animated Gecko sell car insurance? This transition of thought is a little easier to understand. In 1936 the Government Employee Insurance Company was formed and titled G-E-I Co, Geico. In the 1970s they began to insure the general public. To go from Geico to Gecko is an easy mental jump, but to use a green lizard to sell car insurance? Can you imagine how long it took to approve that advertising idea? And yet somehow it works...

I was taught in my marketing classes to use something that everyone can relate to and build your ideas from there...Living in Wisconsin not all of us have even seen a real tiger or a gecko close up, let alone knew they could walk on two legs and speak English... The next thing we learned in marketing class was to use something or someone out of the ordinary to catch people’s attention and help them remember.

With no way to know what God is thinking...what was God thinking to send angels as messengers? And then, a messenger like John to prepare the way for all that Jesus would do and be? John, who was born into a good family; the right lineage...Born to older parents who had prayed and waited many years for a child and had almost lost hope that their prayers would be answered, when Elizabeth conceived. John whose father believed it was no longer possible and questioned the *angel messenger*, and went voiceless for 9 months until the birth of his son, John.(that advent story is also in Luke chapter one).

Stereotypically, we can imagine that Zechariah and Elizabeth’s long awaited, only son was fiercely protected and coddled as a child. Over trained, almost smothered, and spoiled. The one at school who either acted out, because they were used to getting their own way, or the one who was always different because they were raised by the parents a generation older than all of the other parents, and thus with the largest generation gap to overcome; The one who grew up without siblings and so was used to their own company.

What was it that sent John to the wilderness where he subsisted on grasshoppers and honey and wore animal hair clothing? Was it the word from the prophet Isaiah that said “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:” Whatever sent him there it was ‘the word of God that came to him, there.’ That brought him into his ministry. As a marketing tool John worked well for the people. They crowded around to hear the good news that the Messiah for which they had been waiting through many generations was coming to them, soon!

Certainly, a strange message service, but one intricately set up, way ahead by God, to begin this chapter in history of the coming of a Savior for the people. We know that Jesus came as the ultimate messenger for us. God with us...Christmas is all about telling the strange (or unique) story of the arrival of Jesus as messenger for all of humanity. But we often forget about the need for the next messenger; The ones who carried the story into the future.

In today's readings, it is Luke we receive the message from; Luke a physician, sharing the story of the good news of the coming of the Son of God. The message is: God has redeemed us; we have a mighty savior, the one foretold to our ancestors; the holy covenant still stands - God is with us, and we can serve our Creator without fear; through Christ we will have light and be guided to peace. It is a good thing that God had Luke and others to record this message for us; a Word to stand the test of time. One we can share through our witness to our world.

God depended on a strange message service giving Peter, a fisherman – the work of starting the church, by gathering people as he once gathered fish; Giving Paul, a Pharisee, persecutor of the Christians, a missionary vocation to tell the message across sea and countries with the boldness that he once pursued people who did the same, before him.

Like a message in a bottle that is thrown out into the sea, God took a chance on humanity that the message would travel and be found worthy of sharing. Like a message in a bottle, the author never knows how far it will go or how it will be received. But if the message is never sent, it is the end of the journey before it begins.

What if the message had stopped in Israel? What if the Gospel writers hadn't recorded because the writing materials were difficult to work with? What if the disciples hadn't established the ministry because of the risk to themselves? What if Paul had stayed home because the travel was just too difficult? What if Jesus' message hadn't been carried through time to us? **And** what if we don't share the message?

The day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, people shouted the message. Some Pharisees said to Jesus "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." And Jesus answered them: "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout out." Now that really would be a strange message service...We don't feel many earthquakes in Wisconsin, but if the rocks start to tremble, is it a sign that we have let the message drop?

Are you now thinking "Surely, God doesn't want me to shout out the message to anyone..." You are in good company with that thought. Moses said "Not me, send Aaron." Jonah thought he could hide from God so he wouldn't have to deliver the message. Jacob wrestled with the angel before agreeing to move forward. In fact, the book is filled with reluctant messengers, who all carried the message forward so we could have it today.

God knows us so well, why would he even ask? Because God has prepared the way for all of us, just as John prepared the way for Christ. God is already working in your heart to make it possible for you to share the message with others. We will all do it differently: through song, through conversation, through writing, teaching, preaching and yes, some will even shout! Some will share the message through ringing bells for the sake of others, or through sharing their gifts confirming Jesus' message of love.

In 1739, Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, wrote words to a hymn telling of some messengers. "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" is based on the Word from Luke chapter two. Imagine the shepherd's surprise when the angels came to herald the birth of the Son of all humanity. As Charles saw the scene before him, he realized that we are also called to be the messengers and he wrote "Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies; with th' angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

As a messenger, Charles Wesley had no idea almost 300 years ago, how well this song might catch on. It seems that every year I hear it played or sung in the most unusual and amazing places. I can only imagine what Charles Wesley would say if he was transported to the middle of any shopping mall on 'Black Friday' and then heard in techno sound the words he wrote being broadcasted from hidden speakers. Charles wrote the words to over 7000 hymns; this is the one that is still fresh and new each year as we sing it. Don't miss the call for you, written in the song, as you hear it and sing it this season.

The message is still the same – the words have changed, a bit. Steven Curtis Chapman, a contemporary Christian Musician wrote a song that has these words: *Imagine this I get a phone call from Regis - he says "Do you want to be a millionaire?" They put me on a show and I win with two lifelines to spare. Picture this: I act like nothing ever happened and bury all the money in a coffee can. Well, I've been given more than Regis ever gave away. I was a dead man who was called to come out of my grave.*

I think it's time for makin' some noise: Wake the neighbors! Get the word out. Come on, crank up the music, climb a mountain and shout. This is life we've been given, made to be lived out. So, la, la, la, la, live out loud. Think about this Try to keep a bird from singing after it's soared up in the sky. Give the sun a cloudless day and tell it not to shine.

Think about this If we really have been given the gift of life that will never end; And if we have been filled with living hope, we're gonna overflow! And if God's love is burning in our hearts, we're gonna glow. There's just no way to keep it in. The title of the song is "Live Out Loud."

It was declared by the Angel Gabriel before John was even conceived that he would 'prepare the way of the Lord.' God already has a plan for how you can be one of the messengers. Don't concern yourself with the right words for the message, the Holy Spirit will help you with that part. God has been preparing you for just such a time.

You can go ahead and think that God must mean someone else, but...then accept that we each have a part of the message to carry to someone who needs to hear God's love this Christmas. God will ask: "Would you be an angel and take this message out for me?"

PRAY: Lord, *We've a message to give to the nations, that you, who reigneth above has sent us your Son to save us, and show us that you are love, and show us that you are love. For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright; and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, the kingdom of love and light. Amen.*