

Signs of the Savior Matthew 11:2–15 Advent3A16 12-11-16

In a recent interview Taya Kyle, the widow of Navy Seal Chris Kyle, responded about billboards that read, “Make Christmas Great Again, Skip Church.” When asked how to reach the billboard sponsors, she said, *“It’s up to individuals like you and I. ... We don’t have to do a hard sell, or a big push, we just have to live our faith, love people, take care of people on a personal level. We reach people by caring for each other, and they see Christ through us and that will motivate them..rather than having it shoved down their throats.”*

She is describing a ministry of caring that Jesus did and confirmed for John that Jesus was whom he was expecting. He healed the deaf, blind, lame, and leper, raised the dead, and proclaimed the good news of God’s love.

But why would John need a sign? Hadn’t he seen and heard enough? When he baptized Jesus, he saw the presence of Holy Spirit as a dove and heard God’s voice say that Jesus is His beloved Son? Yet, John asked for confirmation after being arrested for condemning King Herod’s adultery. If Jesus is the Son of God, why does his prophet languish in jail? Why isn’t Jesus judging the wicked as John had proclaimed He would?

What Taya Kyle left out as a role for Christians is too often the very thing we do and expect from Christ. Christians today, as did some first century Jews, look for the wrong signs as affirmation that Jesus is Lord. If He is, why doesn’t the Church have more power in civil matters? Where is our kingdom? Despite Jesus’ telling Pontius Pilate that He has no earthly kingdom, Christians of every political persuasion tend to edit and exploit his message to promote their idea of how God’s will is to be done on earth as it is heaven.

Another wrong sign of the Savior is the expectation that believers should be free from suffering, injustice, poverty, poor health, mental and emotional maladies, or personal moral failings. They wonder, if Christ is Lord, why am I such a mess? Why do bad things happen to me?

If we seek personal or corporate success as signs of the Savior then we miss the savior’s purpose for coming. It wasn’t to spare John from suffering, or to free Israel, or to make any nation great again, but to release us from the consequences of sin.

The miracles Jesus did were not strictly for the primary effect of curing a disease or lifting one’s spirit. They were to show that the kingdom of God had arrived. Death and disease are consequences of sin. Their elimination was the sign that the one who forgives sins has come in the world.

Likewise, we among whom the Kingdom has come have signs that Christ is Lord and Savior. Though God could save us without a sign, we would be hard pressed to notice it and believe. So he gave us a sign in baptismal water. It points back to the death and resurrection of Christ that cleansed us from sin and continues to do so. He gave us the sign of his body and blood in bread and wine to signal his ongoing presence of grace and redemption.

Jesus pointed to his caring as a sign to John’s disciples and then called those blessed who was not offended by him. That word means to be scandalized, to fall into a trap that causes you to lose the faith. Many fall away because they were scandalized by Christ’s mission. He didn’t do what they expected. They looked for the wrong signs, and failing to find them, they stopped following him. They did then and they do today.

The sign he gives us is the sign of the cross. There he identified the kind of saving we needed: forgiveness of sins and hope of eternal life. There the Almighty who became flesh and blood gave himself up for our salvation. There He saved us whether we are free or imprisoned, healthy or sick, struggling or victorious. He saves us not through politics, surgery, or the stock market.

Now we are a sign of the Savior as we do what Taya Kyle suggested and what Jesus did. We live our faith, love and take care of people on a personal level without a hard sell or political party.

When life brings more hardship than happiness we may be tempted to become the wrong sign and to look for the wrong sign of a Savior. It takes God-given faith and courage to sit in the prison with John and know that if Christ has come, that is enough. We need not look for another. God has given us the Sign of the Savior. His name is Jesus. Amen.