

From the time you get up in the morning to when you say your prayers at night; you have been exposed to literally thousands of marketing voices. For instance: you might read a daily newspaper, you probably log on to social media on a regular basis, perhaps you check your email constantly, maybe you drive past billboards on your way to work. Most likely you listen to the radio, or to a podcast, when you're driving in your car. Perhaps you surf a number of websites with your smartphone each day, and if and when you have some free time maybe you like to watch some TV or stream movies or shows using Hulu.

A few weeks ago, in my sermon, I mentioned that now adays we are exposed to between 4,000-10,00 ads a day, which I am sure we can agree is a lot of marketing information. In fact, you might even say that with all of that exposure to so many commercials and advertisements, most of us view them as a nuisance equivalent to walking through a swarm of 4,000 to 10,000 gnats. Which begs the question, with such an oversaturated market, how do you get your product to stand out? The answer: Influencers.

Influencer marketing relies on the expertise, reach, and notoriety of a particular influencer. Sometimes that person is a celebrity, or a well-known social media personality, and the right message, coupled with the right influencer and/or the right people, can make all the difference. It's important to note however, that for the most part influencers are normal people who for one reason, or another, have a lot of clout in their own sphere of influence. When advertising gurus identify influencers from a certain group they then take a closer look at them to find out what they like, why they like it, how they like it, and when they like it.

If a company selling men's razors, for example, can uncover influencers within the National Football League, they will try to produce a razor the influencers like, because if they like it, most of the rest of the players will like it,

too. And if NFL players like a razor, the men of America will be inclined to buy that razor because it is preferred by those gladiators of the turf we enjoy watching.

And yet, as we consider the kinds of people Jesus usually chose to help him out with his earthly ministry, it is quite apparent that he didn't look for celebrities when he started his own type of "marketing campaign." Jesus didn't look for a sympathetic rock star or a Pharisee to peddle his message. He didn't seek out a famous Sadducee for a shout-out on his behalf. His statement that he didn't come to revoke the Law, but that he came to fulfill it, was not designed to win support from a legendary scribe or world renowned scholar.

Nope. Jesus was looking for local people who had power, presence, and persuasion. And if they didn't have it, he chose people he knew could be trained to get it. So Jesus found 70 people who didn't particularly stand out, but, clearly, they were people Jesus knew could be influencers. When, therefore, Jesus began to spread the word about the arrival of the kingdom of God, he didn't launch an ad campaign.

Oddly enough, that's precisely what Roman emperors of that time would do to announce the "good news" of their accession to the throne. They would mint coins with pictures of themselves as a way of announcing to the world that they were now in charge and that peace would reign. But rather than announcing his message through mass distribution, Jesus chose a campaign of 70 influencers, sending them out in pairs. He believed that those 70 had the power to sway people toward the kingdom of God!

But why did he choose 70? Why not 50 or 100 or 1000? Perhaps Luke is giving us an echo of the 70 nations of Jewish tradition found in Genesis, or of God's command to Moses to choose 70 elders to aid him in leading the people of Israel in the book of Numbers. Luke tells us that earlier, Jesus had sent out 12 disciples in a similar way, but now the number of influencers has been expanded.

Maybe those who had now become influencers had been influenced by that original mission of the 12!

Regardless of reason, we should keep in mind that the 70 influencers were chosen by Jesus to go to the places where he himself “intended to go.” They would be his reps for His kingdom message, and, as such, they were not to travel in a way that would make them appear like peddlers for any other agenda. They didn’t travel with fine clothes, or a particular brand of purse or sandal, nor were they to spend time chatting up people who might distract them from their mission. They were to be fully exposed, “like lambs into the midst of wolves,” and were to rely solely on the kindness of strangers. In this way, they were to be very much like Jesus himself: open, honest, vulnerable, and approachable!

Ok, so that begs the question, what exactly were his influencers peddling? For Jesus, the kingdom of God was a comprehensive package of world-changing ideas, actions, and events designed for both Jews and Gentiles alike. The message Jesus was endorsing, via his influencers, thus contained both a message of hope and a warning. The way forward was through an initial offering of peace, but refusal to buy into the peace Jesus was offering meant doom. If the peace the 70 were offering wasn’t received, it would be returned to them so they could then to offer it to someone else.

The key features of the peace that those individuals were promoting began with hospitality. In Middle Eastern culture, to eat with someone indicated an important bond. When Jesus’ influencers were invited in to receive hospitality, they were to remain in the same house and eat and drink whatever was put before them. To be a good guest meant that those who received you were more apt to listen to you, and be influenced by you. The more bonded you became to someone in friendship; the more likely it was that they would listen to your message. Another way to put it, if a friend tells you about a product they’ve discovered

that's made a difference in their life; you're much more likely to get it for yourself. The same is true with regards to the good news of God's kingdom.

Another key feature of any good campaign is to demonstrate that what you're selling actually works. The 70 were **not only** selling peace, but they were also offering authenticity. They demonstrated to others that what they were peddling was the real deal, and that what they had to offer worked and was reliable. In order to do this, the 70 were to "cure the sick" who were present in a particular town as a sign that the kingdom had come near. After all, the kingdom of God is about peace, wholeness, and restoration, and the 70 were sent out to simply do what Jesus was doing wherever he went. The arrival of the kingdom of God meant that things were changing, and wherever Jesus or his influencers went, that change would become apparent in the bodies and spirits of others.

These days, it's fairly easy for a consumer to simply scroll past and ignore a never-ending series of ads, The good news of the kingdom of God, however, is that it can't be so easily dismissed. Rejecting it has consequences, and Jesus' 70 influencers weren't to spend any time trying to convince the unmotivated, who are notoriously invulnerable to insight. Those towns that refused Jesus' offer of peace would suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah. And his subsequent warnings to some of the towns around the Sea of Galilee indicated that rejecting him would have similar consequences.

Of course, it probably isn't all that surprising for us to hear that nowadays Jesus is still looking for influencers to represent him — people who are willing to band together to take the good news of his triumph over: Satan, evil, sin, and death into a world where people are buying into everything but the truth. He's looking for people who are willing to offer peace to the world instead of more cruelty, snark, or malice. He's looking for those who are willing to eat with and make friends with neighbors, outsiders, and strangers alike, allowing for an opportunity

for the good news of the Gospel to be heard! And the cool thing is that we don't have to be famous, an athlete, a movie star, or even a rock star to make it happen.

Jesus just wants someone who's real, and who's willing to share with others about who God is and what God has done for them. And more importantly, Jesus wants people who really know about and use the "products" he offers us. Jesus wants influencers who not only love what they've found, but who actually put into practice what they have discovered! To put it simply, it's really all about simply sharing what we've experienced.

Influencers influence others to be influencers! Thankfully, the good news about Jesus isn't a product to be sold, but a reality to be lived. After all, people will more often than not often buy into Jesus, because they buy into you, and those who truly live the way of Jesus are the best marketers of the greatest solution to the world's greatest need! And Thanks be to God for that. Amen.