

## Divine Marketing

*"Sometimes they strew His way, and His sweet praises sing;*

*resounding all the day Hosannas to their King"*

John Ireland

We've relegated Brexit to the thought for the day right), from which you can click through to get the full text of the EU-Canada free trade agreement if you so wish. This is holy week, and that takes precedence.

One of the most memorable sermons - but it was in fact more like a homily - to which I have listened was in Lambeth Palace Chapel several years ago, in the run-up to Easter break. The then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave a totally different perspective on Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, describing it as divine marketing: hugely raising the profile and significance of the world-changing days ahead.

The bridge between business and faith does not come easily for many people, notwithstanding the fact that most of Jesus' teaching was in the context of everyday business life. The Archbishop's revelation was quite an eye opener for me, so this week we look at what the Gospels teach us about divine marketing.

There are two main dimensions of marketing: the macro-level, often seen as image advertising, and the micro-level, which is all about relationships. Both are important: you need name awareness to build public familiarity, and therefore an element of trust, but unless you can deliver effectively for individuals there is a limit to how much benefit your organisation will gain from name awareness alone.

There are few organisations which can crack both levels effectively. Arguably it's only the high-quality tech giants such as Apple and Amazon who have succeeded in recent years. Meanwhile others, such as Facebook, have learnt how fragile name awareness can be: reputations take years to build, but can be undermined in days.

Jesus Christ understood the significance of both these levels perfectly and, while the history of the past two thousand years have not often covered his followers in glory, the vibrancy and reach of the Christian faith is without doubt, and today bears witness to his effectiveness in getting his message across.

Indeed Krish Kandiah, founding director of [home for good](#), illustrates this appeal in his book 'Paradoxology':

".. far too often the name of Jesus seems to be easily co-opted into whatever system, campaign, cause or crisis that needs a mascot or a justification or a swear word. Just as the image of Father Christmas is used during December to sell everything from food to furniture, Coca Cola to consoles, so Jesus is co-opted by both Republicans and Democrats, capitalists and socialists. Ascetics and gluttons appeal to him as one of their own. Soldiers pray to him and pacifists appeal to his example. Jesus' radical commands about sharing possessions have been grist to the mill for communist revolutionaries: at the same time his birthday is used as the engine for consumer capitalism's biggest sales opportunity."

In his homily in Lambeth Palace, Archbishop Rowan explained how the [triumphal entry into Jerusalem](#) - Jesus riding on a donkey, feted by thousands of his disciples - provided the big picture stage for the culmination of his ministry. He argued that, had the passion of Christ not been preceded by this extraordinary spectacle, the events of Easter week would not have had anywhere near the same world-changing effect as they did. It upped the ante - massively raising the profile of Jesus' message of how love and humility can conquer all: and it still celebrated by the distribution of palm leaves in churches throughout the world each Palm Sunday.

But, for the micro-level, we have to look much more directly at the teachings and direction of Jesus during his ministry. In particular it's worth looking closely at the [sending out of seventy-two disciples](#) recounted in the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 10. This was relationship marketing on a very individual basis: they were told to go two by two, to take nothing

with them, to remain focused at all times, to stay at just one house per town, to go into the streets healing the sick and giving the good news of the Christian faith. It worked.

Relationship marketing is vitally important, and builds a depth of trust which far surpasses that of name awareness working by itself. At the commercial level, it may explain why [Coca Cola, that huge multinational, bought Costa Coffee](#) when it was sold by Whitbread plc last year. In these days, when high street retailing is seriously feeling the squeeze, it's worth remembering that there may still be a relationship role for the high street on the other side of Debenhams' collapse.

It's something charities need to keep closely in mind, as well. For example, it is only possible for a small charity like [The Share Foundation](#) to provide its reach right across the United Kingdom by concentrating on the big picture: and that's what it's done in providing an online financial education programme for young people in care - its 'Stepladder of Achievement'. But this will only really be effective if it gets the relationships working at the local level as well and, to do this, it must work in partnership with local mentoring organisations

Likewise, the recent [Westminster Hall debate](#) helps to raise the profile of its recovery plan for the Child Trust Fund, but the painstaking work of re-linking accounts will only bear fruit as a result of its network of [Child Trust Fund ambassadors](#) and detailed relationship matching made possible by co-operation with HM Revenue & Customs.

It's these local relationships which will make the work come alive for young people, and really deliver life-changing opportunities for their future.

So there's much to be learned by studying the Bible, and this week is a great time to do it. It certainly makes for a refreshing break from Brexit.

Gavin Oldham

Share Radio