
GIVING DIRECTIONS

As we approach wildfire season, I was recalling the Sayer fire in the San Fernando Valley in 2008.

- One of the main intersections in the area was closed to all except emergency vehicles.
 - Cars was diverted to different routes.
 - Police officers, wearing breathing masks because of the smoke and ash, were giving directions to traffic:
 - making sure fire trucks, ambulances, and other emergency vehicles got through first;
 - giving directions for other vehicles;
 - helping to keep traffic flowing to where it needed to go.

It was an important thing they were doing.

- Not much glamor. Not much appreciation from the drivers who were being redirected (though I always gave them a wave).

Giving directions is a very important job.

In the movie Miracle on 34th Street, a fellow claiming to be Kris Kringle gets a job as Santa at Macy's Department Store.

- When customers come with their children, part of his job was to direct them to the right department of the store to buy the gifts for which a child asked.
- On occasion, though, there would be a toy requested that Macy's didn't carry.
 - So, Kris would suggest that they go to Macy's biggest competitor, Gimbles and find the item there.

This didn't sit well with the management at Macy's until it was discovered that customers actually liked Macy's better for doing this.

- And it improved Macy's sales as more people came there first to shop.

It's kind of a running gag about men not stopping to ask for directions.

- I get it, because I like to think I can find my own way around.
 - So, I can't understand why when I go the movie theater, the usher, who tears my ticket in half (right after I get it) has to look at the stub and then tell me where the specific theater is.
 - After all, there aren't that many theaters, and their numbered, and my half of the ticket also has the number on it, and the names of the movies are above each theater.
 - I'm sure I can find it myself.

On the other hand, Dodger Stadium is a BIG place.

- So, when an usher comes up and offers to give me directions, I'm glad for the help.
 - I guess appreciation for the one giving directions depends on how much trouble you're having finding your way.

Maybe that's why so many people were going out to the Jordan River to see John the Baptizer.

- Maybe they were feeling lost in a world with priests telling them they weren't worthy of GOD, the Romans ordering them around and overtaxing them, and their own spirituality telling them something else.

So, when "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" came saying, "Make straight the way of the LORD," the people came to him.

- A road that runs straight to the LORD sounded like a very good thing, especially for those who felt they needed finding their way.

It was about twenty-five years ago at the beginning of Advent that my late wife, Lori, and I found out that we were going to have a fifth child and a second son.

- Then, Lori came home after a checkup with the news that there was no longer a heartbeat.
 - No life. No baby to be born.

Many in similar situations have wandered away from GOD and become lost over:

- the death of a loved one;
- the unexpected diagnosis of a doctor;
- the end of a marriage;
- the loss of a job or home.

Any of these things or a number of others can leave a person feeling lost and needing direction—direction for a place of hope.

- It's for these lost and wandering people that GOD sends out individuals to give directions:
 - people directed, as the prophet says,
 - to bind up the broken hearted,
 - to proclaim freedom for the captives,
 - release from darkness and prison,
 - to comfort those who mourn.
- John the Baptizer was one such person.
 - John didn't make it about himself.
 - Today GOD needs many more like John.

I know I often talk about how it that we need to invite others, and I often wonder how you hear that.

- Are those just words that you expect to hear but don't think they really apply to you?
- Do you hear them but quickly decide that you don't know anybody whom you could bring to church.
- Does someone come to mind who could use GOD in their life, but worry that you might not know what to say or that they wouldn't listen to you?
 - Or do you not even hear the words at all?

My Uncle Paul was a pastor and a missionary to Japan.

- Every time he spoke about people who didn't know the LORD, he would break into tears.
 - He had such deep passion for those who didn't have CHRIST in their lives that it would actually cause him to weep for them.

I'll admit that I don't have the depth of passion that my uncle had,

- but I do worry about those who do not have a relationship with the LORD.
 - I'm always looking for ways to talk with people about JESUS.

A few years ago, I had my hairs cut by a new person.

- I talked with her about the area where we lived,
 - and places to go sightseeing,
 - and how long she had worked there,
 - and where I worked,
 - and if she went to church anywhere (which she used to but doesn't now),
 - and why she quit going (her church seemed too judgmental),
 - and how not all churches are the same,
 - and why I find church valuable for my life (and I'm not just saying that because I'm a pastor),
 - and that she was welcome to visit us at the church I was serving.

- Well, she's didn't come while I was there, but one day she might, or maybe she'll think about go somewhere else.
- In any case, hopefully, I gave her some direction.

GOD calls us to step forward and direct traffic—to help those who are lost so that they might find their way straight to the LORD.

- That's one reason GOD created us to be in community—so that we can help each other, as well as those who are wandering in the wrong direction.

John was not the LIGHT, but he came to give testimony to be the LIGHT.

- John diminished himself so that JESUS might be seen as the ONE to whom to go to—the true place of comfort, of healing, of hope.

Remember those police officers directing traffic?

- They served in that unappreciated position so that others could deliver emergency help.
 - What would happen if they decided they didn't want to risk standing in traffic?
 - Traffic might have become blocked and people wouldn't have received what they needed.
 - Think what would have happened if each of those officers had stopped every car to tell the driver his or her name?
 - It's only when the officers make themselves less and focus on those trying to find their way that their ministry is effective.
 - It's only when John makes himself less and focuses on the needs of those lost people that they are able to find JESUS.
 - It's only when we say, "It's not about me and what I want or how I feel," that we can focus on those who need healing or comfort or freedom.
 - It's only when we choose to be less that we can direct those in need to the ONE who can bring them more.

The world needs more people to give directions.

- That is our purpose.
- We know the truth about who JESUS is and what HE has to offer.
 - John knew that truth and so he started giving directions to the truth.
 - But John isn't here today.
 - We are.
 - GOD is calling us to take John's place.
 - You—go—find the lost, and then give directions.