

PRECIOUS CARGO

Through out the Sundays of Lent, we've been referring to signs, including signing on,... which is a sign of commitment.

Signs inform, and we encounter lots of signs, all kinds of signs every day. Some are very important, and some of deceptive... or even ridiculous,... and it is essential that we know the difference.

Ten to fifteen years ago, it was common to see a sign in the back window of a car,... that didn't make much sense to me.
The sign said, "Baby on board."

I was happy for the proud parents, but I think the purpose of the sign was more than just to boast.

I think it was meant as a warning to protect their precious cargo? So, when I'd drive up to a car with that sign, I'd think, "Oh, that's good to know,...because I was about to ram you off the road, but now I won't."

The broader message of that sign is that they cared very much about their child.

Which makes me wonder about my parents.... and all parents before the days of protective, child car seats.

When I was a kid, we didn't have seat belts, and since we had a station wagon, I often sit in the very back with the window open – a very dangerous thing to do.
But,..... I only fell out of a moving car twice.....

Were those pre-seat belt conditions a sign of indifference,....carelessness,... recklessness,... or just ignorance?

I think my parents cared for me, because when I'd fall out, they did stop the car, and check on me, and even let me back in the car.

It is very important to take care / protect a precious cargo, and if that doesn't happen,... then... that is a strong message, albeit unclear message,..... because it may be a sign of indifference, carelessness, recklessness,.... or just ignorance.

Jesus was cargo riding on a young donkey, that day, 2,000 some years ago.

Most observers must have thought it strange that he selected such an insignificant mode of transportation,..... after all, he Was the Messiah.... AND... this was his first visit to THE city of Jerusalem.

People did make the ride a little more comfortable... by placing their cloaks / outer garments on the donkey for Jesus to sit on.

Riding the donkey was a sign....that referred to old stories about a “servant” Messiah, ... but apparently the crowd didn’t see it... or chose Not to. Because, they gestures and chants indicated that they were hoping Jesus was the powerful, rescuing King, sent by God to reclaim David’s Kingdom.

But, Jesus didn’t ride a mighty stallion, surrounded by an entourage of gilded chariots.

He did Not go to Jerusalem to defeat the Romans and set up a Jewish dynasty. His demeanor was reflective of the suffering servant in the Isaiah text.

But, the people didn’t want that sort of Messiah.

It is interesting how we project grand characteristics on our leaders. Most people want to admire, even worship their leaders. And, most leaders to hone and polish their image to be more appealing.

Russian President Putin goes to great lengths to make himself appear strong and inspiring.

I supposed Jesus could have crafted his persona to meet the people’s expectations. He could have arranged for “Jesus” bumper stickers, and a stallion would have been a good touch, too. He could have controlled media access, and arranged for only opportunistic photo shoots.

The crowds would eat that stuff up, and grant him more power and devotion. I bet he could have proclaimed all of Judea as a Christian nation, even mandating prayer in school,..... if he would have worked on selling himself.

But, Jesus didn’t engage in that hype or image control.

It’s interesting how many people still want to dress him up and cultivate the idealised icon Jesus.

The pictures we have of Jesus present a strong, wavy haired, fair skinned man. I’ve seen some that show him as a hammer swinging, muscle flexing carpenter.

We don’t know what Jesus looks like, and maybe the absence of his physical appearance, in the Gospels, is a sign—a sign that his appearance didn’t matter.

Who knows,.... he could have been short and bald? And, maybe he was a lousy carpenter. Not one person ever asked him to make anything. ????

On the back of a lowly, young donkey, Jesus entered Jerusalem, looked around and then left.

So much for riding the palm leaf wave of adulation.

Jesus did return to the city because he had a mission. Jesus was carrying a message for all to witness and hear.

In fact, Jesus was carrying a precious cargo.
He wasn't the cargo, but rather, he was the delivery man.

Jesus' cargo was God message for all humanity—a message of justice, peace and love that brings salvation.

Jesus always pointed to God.
His life and mission was Not about himself.
Jesus always directed worship and faithfulness to God.
He didn't tell people to pray to him.
We pray to, we worship and serve God. That is what Jesus taught and modelled.

Yes, we claim to be followers of Jesus..... because we take on his message. We do not worship a messiah.

It's Not the person, it is the message / the lessons / the way of being... from God that redeems us and that can heal the world.

It's the message, Not the person.
And, we sometimes trip over that.

I know a number of very charismatic pastors, and they have large devoted followers – I mean.... members in their churches.
We like to admire our leaders, so cultivating an image... is effective.

A friend will often tell me about his pastor—about all the amazing things he's doing and how wonderful he is. He points out that his church is overflowing, and how his pastor was recently interviewed on national TV.

Fortunately.... or unfortunately,... I wasn't blessed with charismatic charm. I know I'm not a real warm fuzzy person, and since I'm an introvert, I'm not much at working a crowd, either.

And, I also know,... that if it wasn't for Leslie,... I'd be in real trouble in the approval category.
But,..... that's okay,..... because it's not about the person; it's the message.

The most encourage commit I can hear is, “I appreciated the message today.”
And, I often point out,..... that its all in the Bible.

The message is what matters;..... however, it probably wouldn't hurt if I worked on my public persona some.....

Next Sunday is Easter,..... and I will wear my suite.

Speaking of clothing, I read that the sign that your outfit / the clothes you're wearing properly matches you is how people respond.

If they say, “Wow,... nice dress” ...or... “great shirt”... or shoes or whatever, then..... that out fit is not complimentary.

If they say, “My,... you look good today.”, then your clothes are rightly presenting you.

We have been handed a precious cargo to share with everyone.

If we are concerned about our image – looking like a model Christian / if we're wearing those flashy moral platitudes and showing what an upright person we are in order to get approval,.....

Then,.... I don't think we're doing a good job of delivering our precious cargo.

Instead, if our words and lives make the world a better place,....

If people turn to justice and peace,

if because of our living presence ... someone sees God or experiences love,..... then... we've rightly delivered the precious cargo handed to us.

To be sure,..... there will be hazardous and potholes along the journey.

This is passion week, and it was a tough week for Jesus.

But,..... he faithfully delivered the cargo,..... and now it's ours to deliver.