

Hello New Life!

Joe Papparone, your friendly-neighborhood Global Outreach Coordinator here. If you've been at church the past few weekends, you've heard, either in the sermon or in some faith stories, about "Advent Conspiracy" I wanted to give you a little more information on what exactly that is and how you can be involved.

Advent Conspiracy is an approach to Christmas that reclaims the central story, as Mark talked about this weekend. A holiday that celebrates a core event in Christianity has been hijacked and subsumed by a different story, a story with shopping, stress, debt, and real and imagined nostalgia all balled up into one.

So in our faithfulness to Christ we step out of the culture's story and look at the real one. We look at the birth of Christ and see what kinds of gifts He gave to us. He gave Himself. Relationship. Connection. He risked and sacrificed in order to invest in us.

How could we possibly do anything like that? We can start by taking a deep breath. As Mark talked about this weekend, the response of the people surrounding Jesus' birth was worship. We begin by recognizing the good gifts God has given us in His son.

And then, as Jesus so often said, we go and do likewise. We can give gifts that are invested with meaning. Gifts of time, talent, creativity. Gifts that reflect our relationship with each other.

Take a quick minute and try to remember the gifts you received last year. Unless it was something big, like a car or an Ipod, you'd likely be hard-pressed. How about the gifts you gave? Last year was the second year Lesley and I really dove into this, and I remember snowboarding with my brothers-in-law, making pasta for Italian dinner baskets, sanding and finishing a hiking staff for a friend in Middle Ground, and wood-burning ornaments for family and friends.

Now a danger here would be to make a rule about this. No one is saying you can't buy things or spend money (taking my two brothers snowboarding was certainly more expensive than what I would have bought them!) But we're trying to more faithfully follow Christ by giving gifts with meaning, rather than just checking off a list with gift cards that are bought because "they got you something last year"

This stuff isn't easy. We've been sold a cultural lie that we're not creative, and therefore we HAVE to buy things in order to give gifts of value. Let's dispel that lie right now. God thinks you have value. He created you in His image, and He is a creative creator. Therefore, you are creative. He thinks you have something to offer the world, and He sent His son to prove it on the cross.

So even if you don't feel like you're the creative type (I feel woefully inadequate if I compare myself to Lesley) always remember that you have God-given gifts, talents, and treasures. Sometimes we've bought into the cultural lie so much we need others to remind us of our gifts.

This is why this whole thing works best in community. Talk with your small group, your neighbors, your co-workers. Share your ideas, affirm each others giftings, and conspire together.

Lastly, we remember that Christ gave his gifts to the whole world. With the money you've saved, consider giving to our brothers and sisters around the world who have so much less. Over a billion people on earth don't have clean drinking water. I know our economy is in rough shape, but I can't imagine how bad it would have to get before we didn't have water.

Here are some web resources you can check out to follow up:

www.adventconspiracy.org

www.re-thinkingchristmas.com

www.instructables.com

www.camaservices.org – the relief and development arm of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

There are articles up on the Global Outreach board in the lobby if you'd like to read more. I look forward to hearing your stories this coming year!

Grace and peace,

Joe Papparone