

The news headline read: ***Dark chocolate is now a health food. Here's how that happened.***<sup>1</sup> Because it's one of those lines that just begs for explanation. I can boil it all down for you in one word: ***marketing***. That's how chocolate became a health food. That's how it happened. If we want, we could use as many as five words to summarize the article: *clever marketing and wishful thinking*. Because here's the thing. It doesn't matter how many studies are commissioned by companies like Hershey's or Mars, we all know that almost all the chocolate in our country is candy. We just celebrated Halloween, for goodness sake. Of the billions of dollars spent on Halloween candy, more than 70% was chocolate.<sup>2</sup>

No amount of marketing can turn candy into health food. But here's the brilliant thing: no one has to change any candy. **They just have to change our perception.** They don't have to perform a miracle; just give us permission to do something we already want to do. That's the brilliant thing. You might be eating junk food, but you can see yourself as a saint.

It's a brilliant campaign, even introducing an air of respectability for our candy. "You can now sit there with your [chocolate bar] and say I'm getting my flavonoids." Candy makers want us to believe their products border on healthy, when in reality, "Chocolate is just one of America's favorite sugar delivery devices." How'd they do it? How'd it happen? Marketing is how it happened. The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/10/18/15995478/chocolate-health-benefits-heart-disease>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/10/27/most-popular-halloween-candy-in-usa/3274967/>

transformation of chocolate from junk food to superfood is just one more reminder that we can convince ourselves of almost anything — even if our experience (or waistlines!) completely contradicts the fantasy we're chasing.

**There's always been a similar kind of tension about Christians faith.**

Today as we gather for one of the great feasts of the Christian year, the Feast of All Saints, that tension is front & center as we celebrate the lives of all those who have witnessed to Christian faith, hope & love; as we welcome a new child into our family. In the midst of all the excitement and pageantry it's fair — even necessary — to pause for a moment and to think about what we're actually doing when we gather here today. Because a celebration like All Saints just begs for explanation.

Today we celebrate the **victory of God's love & peace** — despite escalating war & violence in our world. The people of NY just suffered another attack last week. We celebrate our **identity as God's children** — despite our obvious flaws & failures. We celebrate the **sacramental birth** of God's life in a child — despite no obvious change in Emmett's appearance or disposition (but please do let us know...). It begs for explanation. Are we chasing a fantasy while so much of our experience contradicts the faith we're celebrating? When we gather for a feast like All Saints, is it just religious marketing & wishful thinking?

If we turn to our readings, they just heighten the tension. In **Revelation**, John the Seer is writing to Christians in the late 1<sup>st</sup> ce. who are facing some kind of persecution for their faith. And what he's advertising is a vision. What he's

*marketing* is a vision. It's a heavenly vision painted in the most glorious terms, with "a great multitude that no one could count" [just like our Presidential inauguration]; people from every nation, from all tribes and languages all standing before God's throne and before Jesus the Lamb; they're robed in white, with palm branches in their hands (Rev. 7.9). What he's *marketing* is a front row seat on divine beauty & goodness. Everyone wants what he's marketing.

The question is, how do we get it? "Who are these [fortunate, blessed ones], robed in white, and where have they come from?" (Rev. 7.13). The reply John *advertises* is that, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," (Rev. 7.14). In other words, the people we want to be, these fortunate & blessed ones who John is *marketing*, these are the ones who suffer faithfully. Faithful suffering for Jesus is the lifestyle that John is *marketing*. "For [Jesus] will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes," (Rev. 7:17). It's a good vision. It's brilliant marketing. But is it true? Or just wishful thinking? Is the Jesus of John's vision actually meaningful in the tension, conflict, or turmoil that we face every day?<sup>3</sup>

There's more. In **1 John**, we hear that all of us; all baptized Christians are *already* children of God. We're *already* people who show the world what God is like; who *already* represent the Body of Christ for our world. What we *will* be is

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<sup>3</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 75

not yet revealed, but we're *already* divine image-bearers now. That's the message he's *marketing*. It's a good message. But is it true?

Do we really make God visible with our lives? Do we really represent the Body of Christ? If so, then why is there still so much pride, envy, greed, gluttony, lust, sloth, and wrath? Why are the so-called 7 Deadly Sins still on full display in so many baptized Christians (present company excluded)? **How do we reconcile the tension between what we hear in Scripture & what we experience in the world?** The tension between God's promised victory of love & peace, despite ongoing suffering & turmoil? Are we just lining up for clever marketing; eating the equivalent of religious junk food while seeing ourselves as saints? That's the tension.

And that's where our **Gospel** comes in. Today's reading from the Sermon on the Mount is how we **resolve the great tension** between God's promises & our experiences. I know, on the surface Jesus' sermon may sound like religious marketing. Because we don't see many poor people in our world who are given kingdoms. In our world, we see billions of hungry people who are never fully satisfied. Merciful people in our world are just as easily treated with cruelty as with mercy.

But here's the key to the Sermon on the Mount: **Jesus isn't marketing, he's teaching.** There's a difference. "He went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and *taught* them," (Matt. 5.1-2).

The Beatitudes, or blessings, are teachings. “Jesus is instructing us in what it [looks like] like to live in the world where God rules.... He is training,” us to live by the reality of God’s Kingdom, “to live by faith and love.”<sup>4</sup>

This teaching in the Sermon on the Mount has two sides. **One side teaches us who’s *already* favored in God’s Kingdom**, whether we see it or not. Because he’s describing all those people we often fail to bless. They’re the ones, we learn, *already* blessed in God’s eyes, even if what they *will* be is not yet revealed. They *will* “hunger no more, and thirst no more,” they *will* no longer be stricken, scorched or burned. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7). Jesus is teaching, to our surprise, that anyone should want to be in their place. Because they will be the ones with a front row seat on divine beauty & goodness. Jesus is teaching, not marketing, because there’s nothing attractive about those people now.

**The other side of his teaching invites us to make their future blessing a present reality.** We’re the ones invited *now* to bless the poor, the suffering, the meek, and the merciful; we’re the ones called *now* to bless the pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. Jesus is teaching us that Church is the community called to resolve the great tension between God’s promises & our experiences. We could say, it’s our job to to make God's love & peace visible now. Jesus is teaching, not marketing, because there’s nothing profitable about blessing those kind of people now.

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<sup>4</sup> Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*.

And when you get down to it, **baptism is one of the best actions we have to make the reality of God's love & peace visible now**; the reality of a future we only ever glimpse in this life. One of the best ways to make God's promises real is by taking a small child who is poor in spirit, meek, and hungry to be treated with righteousness. We take Emmett, and allow him to become the fulfillment of God's promise for us right now. "All Saints' Day is not a celebration of perfection, but the fulfillment of a promise made ... by Christ in our baptisms."<sup>5</sup> It's the fulfillment of a promise that we are *already* people of love & peace. It's the fulfillment of a promise that we are *already* children of God. It's the fulfillment of a promise that God's love & peace are *already* victorious in our world, right here, right now, in the person of Emmett.

And here's the brilliant thing. The more we allow ourselves to be transformed by the reality of those promises right now, then the more others will see something other than clever marketing when they look at our faith. The more we're transformed by the promise of God's love & peace right now, the more others might actually look at us and discover the beauty & goodness of God's truth.  
*Amen.*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ssje.org/2004/10/31/the-promise-of-glory/>