

Unoffended?

John the Baptist, imprisoned and burning with hope for the Messiah, sends friends to check out if this Jesus is the real deal. Christ's response? 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at Me' (Matt. 11:4-6).

Why are Jesus' miracles of transformation offensive to us? Pastor Jimmy Seibert, founder of the evangelical Antioch church planting movement, took heat recently for upholding how his congregations are helping persons with same-sex attraction 'find out who God is and who He has made them to be...I've seen hundreds of people change their direction from SSA to a heterosexual lifestyle. It doesn't mean there isn't struggle...but there has always been grace for those who choose that.'

Yes and amen! We honor the work of Seibert and Antioch--a fresh wave of mercy flowing throughout the USA and the world in order to provide community support for persons turning from all types of false identifications unto Jesus Christ. Among them are persons rendered blind, lame, deaf, and poor by the exploits of the 'gay self' and who discover a whole new way of being in Christ and His Church.

Offensive. What may once have seemed like an ordinary expression of Jesus' transforming love has now become a feast for media vultures. And sadly, as in Jesus' day, it is often the religious establishment who join in the accusations. Remember, it was the Pharisees and Sadducees who railed against Jesus' wonder-working power. They found His almighty mercy disruptive and intrusive; He encroached on their domain with power to set captives free. He exposed their powerlessness to call persons out of the tomb of sin and death. They took offense, and put Him to death.

Similarly, the Jimmy Seiberts are among the bold and few churchmen who do more than uphold the law of God--they champion His power to raise sinners from the dead! To be sure, breaking free of LGBT identification and becoming wholly grounded in Christ is no minor miracle. It requires nothing less than the juncture of our recognized poverty with the One whose love breaks the low ceiling imposed by our rebellion and an unbelieving culture.

Such breakthrough should seem plausible in this season of angelic visitations, pregnant virgins and guiding stars; nevertheless, I encounter Catholics and evangelicals constantly who raise their eyebrows at the prospect of Jesus actually having the power to reorder the sexually disordered.

Maybe that's the rub. Weary and worldly, we now tend to doubt that there's anything 'disordered' about same-sex attraction, or any other gender variation. To recognize another's transformation would be to admit that maybe something is wrong—with a loved one, or with oneself. And that we

are wrong for settling for less than God's best.

And if something is wrong, then what? Does God have good things for us beyond our agreements with the status quo? Will He bear with us in our fragile and inconsistent efforts to become all that He has called us to be?

We are in the center of His heart. Advent is a time of hoping for more, of recognizing that the deserts in our lives are actually virgin territory, the very ground in which Jesus wants to impart to us the seed and water and breath to make us fruitful. A Child is about to be born; He vows to summon a host of sons and daughters from the dead of sin.

'Then will the eyes of the blind be open, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy' (IS 35: 5, 6).