

## Pointing to the Real Thing

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*When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." - Matthew 11:2-6*

Since 1958, a fictional character named Juan Valdez has been used to sell us Americans "100 percent Pure Columbian Coffee." Over the decades, Juan and his faithful donkey, Conchita, have lent an air of authenticity to our purchases. If it's endorsed by Juan, it's the real thing.

A decade ago, Columbian coffee growers noticed that there was a problem. In America, the elderly are not the real thing. They're the over-the-hill thing. And Juan, who was a handsome fellow, was getting older. Whereas he used to get fan mail from college girls drinking coffee to stay awake while studying for finals; suddenly, he was getting fan mail from widows in senior citizen facilities who were drinking coffee in an attempt to, well, stay awake through lunch.

To maintain the "realness" of their coffee, Columbian coffee growers decided not to retire Juan Valdez, but to replace him with a younger Juan Valdez. To produce prequel commercials, Juan in his younger days. I don't know how the campaign turned out. I've been distracted by the bumper sticker, "Juan Valdez Drinks Costa Rican Coffee," which turns out to be true. Juan Valdez is a rather common name. Also by a *Mother Goose & Grimm* cartoon in which a character says, "There's a big crime syndicate in Columbia. So, when they say there's a bit of Juan Valdez in every can, maybe they're not kidding." Lots of lawsuits and counter suits and apologies involved with Juan Valdez.

People want the real thing. This is the issue in the Matthew scripture at the top of the page. Even though John prophesied about the advent of the Messiah, even baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, what he hears in prison doesn't jive with what he expected. Has he been pointing to the wrong guy?

Remember that our perception of what is real is often clouded by notions of what we'd prefer to be real. John wears camel hair clothing that causes him to be fidgety. Eats a high-protein diet of locusts dipped in wild honey. Doesn't drink wine. (John the Baptist, not the Episcopalian.) Jesus dresses much like others, eats what's set before him, and has a reputation for going to parties. John goes around with a scowl on his face condemning people. Jesus openly accepts people, invites everyone to celebrate God's rule.

John's going to have to go back to scripture and rethink what is said about the Messiah. Certainly, that he will heal the sick and proclaim good news to the poor. Is Jesus the one? Or will the Messiah have a different agenda?

Realness is also important today. Presently, there is not an abundance of confidence in the future. Putin, the Eurozone, the Middle East, China. Next generations are predicted to not live as long as their parents, also not make as good a living. Americans in large numbers are preparing to vote for the "least objectionable"

Presidential candidate. And whoever wins, the political process will still be polarized and gridlocked and unfunctional. Even the Doomsday Clock has been rolled back in January 2015 to three minutes until twelve, the closest the world has been to possible global catastrophe since 1984. This determination is based on "[un]checked climate change, global nuclear weapons modernizations, and outsized nuclear weapons arsenals".

So, given the nature of the world in which we live, is Jesus the hope of the world or not? Regardless of the testimonials and propaganda, the hope of the world is not a political party, not a politician, not a country, not a corporation, and not technology. And if Jesus is the hope of our world, why aren't we Christians doing a better job of pointing it out by word and deed?