



*"We are a designer society. We want everything customized to fit our personal needs – our clothing, our food, our education. Now it is our religion."*

~ George Barna

Without sounding overly cynical and snarky, it seems to me that George Barna gets it. We are a consumer society and the church is seen by many as being one of many merchants with products to sell. How many times have you heard someone say, "the church just isn't meeting my needs"? How many Sunday School teachers have felt the pressure of having to make Sunday School "fun" in order for parents to keep bringing their kids back? How many music leaders are given an "audience" request list for favorite hymns to play, or how fast or slow to play the music in worship?

In his book, "Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul", G. Jeffrey MacDonald laments the consumerization of faith when he writes,

"Faith has become a consumer commodity in America. People shop for congregations that make them feel comfortable rather than spiritually challenged. They steer clear of formal commitments to Christian communities. They flee when they are not quickly gratified or when they encounter interpersonal problems. Changing churches has become as routine as changing jobs. As a result, churches are no longer able to help people develop solid moral characters".

So, here's the question. As a church, do we feed people what they want or what they need? A long time ago, Jesus sat on a hillside meeting the needs of thousands by feeding them with a few fish and a couple loaves of bread. After his resurrection, Jesus came to his friend Peter and laying the foundations of the church on Peter's shoulders commanded him to feed God's sheep. Clearly the act of feeding was really important to Jesus. So too is it for us who would follow him.

There are lots of unchurched and de-churched folks who need to hear and be fed by the love and grace of Jesus. Here's my dilemma. How do I do that in ways that are relevant and engaging without turning the priesthood of believers into a company of consumers looking to buy the most appealing "ministry" product?

I completely understand that the church needs to be aware of and responsive to people's needs and to meet folks where they are. But it seems to me that meeting them where they are doesn't mean leaving them there.

When Jesus first started calling people to follow him, he said "those who lose their life for my sake will find it". In these times of numeric decline for mainline churches, do we dare issue such a challenge? When our pews are becoming increasingly empty, do we dare challenge faith consumers to get over their needs and to lose themselves to Christ? If so, what might that even look like?

These are not easy questions to ask in a society as heavily soaked in consumerism as ours, but ask them we must. Who knows, we might even find that in the end we have nothing to sell; just everything to give away.

Peace on the journey,

Pastor Doug