

Mature Christians

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I've been following the buzz surrounding Willow Creek Church's newest "highly effective" way of doing church, an initiative called *Reveal: Where are you?* After a generation of numerical "success," Willow Creek Church has apparently learned that attracting large numbers of people is not the same as forming faithful disciples of Jesus.

We learn this if we listen to John the Baptist during Advent. His preaching summons us to turn our attention away from our own actions and efforts to the coming One who baptizes with the fire of God's Spirit. Even John, the last and greatest of the prophets, can only take us so far with his call to repentance and claims of the law. Although he challenges us with his austere, disciplined way of life and lean, no-frills style of preaching, only the coming of God will save us from all that stands between us and the fullness of God's rule of justice and peace for ourselves, our neighbors and enemies.

John shows—and Willow realizes—that self-help religion, or following a program that advocates principles to meet "deeply felt needs," cannot do the one thing we need more than anything else: the re-creation of our life in God's image through the gift of sharing God's holy love.

This is the work of the Spirit who moved over the waters in the beginning, the same Spirit that spoke through the prophets, that rested upon Jesus at his baptism, that was poured out on all flesh at Pentecost and that graciously continues to dwell in the church. It is not a matter of "effectiveness," of finding the right way of "doing church" or of "being relevant."

During Advent, John calls us to remember that the wisdom of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. The heart of this wisdom is to know who created us and to what end

we are created. This is why John announces that the One who is coming is mightier than he; so much mightier that John does not even presume to be worthy of untying his sandal. The humility required is not self-prescribed improvement or modification of behavior or attitude adjustment. We are destined for union with Christ in the power of the Spirit, for communion with God by grace.

Without the fire of the Spirit, we are destined for frustration in trying to live according to God's demands. We can repeat with our megachurch friends, "This is what God wants you to do". . . . "This is what you need to do". . . . "Here are five things to remember this week," but such moralisms ignore that our final destiny and happiness is life in and with God. They impose a morality that can only invite presumption or promote despair; it lacks a hope in the One who anoints and sets us ablaze with the Spirit's fire.