

Good, unpopular news

By [Nadia Bolz-Weber](#)

July 6, 2009

I serve a funky little Lutheran congregation, a liturgical and sacramental emerging church. Someone recently asked, "Do you think the church you planted will, you know, get really big?"

I smiled broadly, looking up at the sky and then back at my friend. "Um," I said, "well...no." She looked at me, shocked at my seemingly low self-esteem. "There's just not a huge market for the message 'Jesus bids you come and die'," I explained. "People don't exactly line up around the block for that. But 'Jesus wants to make you rich!' seems to be doing really well right now."

It's easy enough to understand the attraction. On some level we all want to be victorious, successful and wealthy. So if someone is willing to tell me that Jesus happens to also want that for us, well, sign me up! That's good news.

Except that it isn't. It's not good news, just *tempting* news. Jesus knew that.

He knew how tempted people would be to hop on the Superman-miracle-worker-healer-rock-star bandwagon. This is why in Mark Jesus keeps instructing people not to not tell anyone about the healings and miracles—because there is no way to know what this God/man is about based only on miracles. We only see who he is when we look upon the cross. The problem is that we'll choose the miracles every time.

This is perhaps why the Gospel writer puts the John the Baptist story here, totally out of time and place. The disciples are riding high on the power of Jesus' healings, teachings and miracles, and it is in this state that Jesus sends them out. In [last week](#)'s Gospel lesson, he tells them to do their work in poverty and to expect rejection. Just in case we don't get it yet—in case we think that this thing is about our own glorification—we are now told of John the Baptist. Lest we think that this whole following-Jesus thing is about glory and not the cross, we are faced this week with the stark contrast between Herod's glory, wealth and power and John's suffering,

poverty and weakness.

It just isn't about cash and prizes. It's about a suffering God who offers us life and salvation, a God who bids us come and die. Is there a line around the block yet?