

## The Church as advert    John 13:34-35    2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Have a look at the following words from the Bible:

- 2 Corinthians 3:1-6: Paul calls the Corinthians 'a letter from Christ'. In our time we might say a tweet or a Facebook entry.
- Just before this (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) he speaks about believers as the aroma of Christ.
- Phil 4:5: 'Let your gentleness be evident to all.'
- Mt 5:16: 'let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'
- John 13:34-35: Jesus says: 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' (We sang Songs of Fellowship 22, 'An new commandment')

What do these verses have in common? They are about 'the press' of the believers, about the reputation of the Church. They say that we are God's publicity, his advertisements. The world does not see God directly, but they see us.

Whether consciously or not, you are always communicating something. In your attitude, in the way you listen (or fail to listen), in your look. So the thesis of this morning is: the Church is an advertisement for Christ. And we should be a good one!

The same was already true for Israel in the Old Testament, as we see esp. in Deuteronomy. The quality of Israel's life would show the gentiles how good God is. Regrettably, that did not always work out well...

[We look at some slides of adverts to see how powerful they can be. And we realise that reputation is everything.]

The Church does not have a good reputation in our society. Think of cases of sexual abuse, for example. She has more than her fair share of critics these days, although sometimes the criticism is unwarranted. But, of course, the Church will inevitably run into criticism: What we're doing is counter-cultural and will never meet with universal applause. Remember that the gospel resulted in the deaths of many prophets, John the Baptist, the apostle Paul and even Jesus himself, to name just a few. Even love gets rejected by this world. But sometimes the Church does deserve the criticism. Let it not be because of us!

We realise the importance we have as adverts for Jesus even more when we remember the expression 'Christ has no hands but ours'. We can say: 'He has no adverts but us.' How will people get a positive impression of Jesus if we don't show his love? If we dislike each other?

So love one another! Really. See the sisters and brothers as new every day, let them make a fresh start.

But not only love other believers, also love others such as Samaritans, Ukrainians, Russians; that difficult neighbour; the temperamental teenager; the person with that dog.

Do people see Jesus in you? They watch you 24/7! How else will they see him?

Whether you like it or not, you are a permanent walking (and talking) advert! (You can ask for forgiveness if you made a mistake.)