

A REEL Epiphany 4)

“Glory”

Pastor Luke Ham

February 5, 2017

This morning we are continuing in our sermon series, “A Reel Epiphany, God in the Movies.”

But before we get into the topic at hand I would like to start off by issuing a public apology to Pastor Ron.

When promoting this sermon series back in December and Early January....I may have insinuated that the film selections that one us of initially made seemed to be less contemporary than the other....

In other words, I made the observation that my film selections were from movies released in the last couple of years....whereas Ron’s were released....well....when I was in elementary school.

However, I now have to admit that when thinking about the film that I would use for today’s topic and changing my mind 3 or 4 times....the film I finally selected is not only more than a couple of years old...but it is the oldest film that either of us have selected so far in the entire sermon series.

Proving the point that sometimes...it is just better to go with a classic!

The movie I selected for today is the 1989 film “Glory” starring Matthew Broderick, Denzel Washington, and Morgan Freeman.

The film tells the story of one of the first military units of the Union Army during the American Civil War to be made up entirely of African-American enlisted men as told from the point of view of Colonel Shaw, its white commanding officer.

Glory won 3 Academy awards as well as many other prestigious honors after its release.

As you can imagine, commanding or serving in the first African American regiments during the Civil War was an especially heroic act as it was criticized or looked down upon by many on both sides of the war.

In the film, We find the the men who volunteer for the 54th Massachusetts Infantry unit come from various background....including one who is well educated, one who is a battlefield gravedigger, one who is a timid freeman with a stutter, there is a hot-tempered slave escapee and one who is a teenage drummer boy who is mute.

Yet they come to join for a common cause. To fight against oppression and prejudice... and not just the oppression they face in the south...but in the north as well.

As we know, military service comes with risk. However, the regiment is soon informed that while in traditional battle prisoners can be taken and put in POW camps for the duration of the way, their unit would be treated differently.

Our first clip gives powerful witness to the risks in which these men were willing to take in order to serve.

Let's watch....

(PLAY CLIP #1- WHO WILL STAY?)

One of the most powerful things a person can do....one of the most courageous statements they can make....is to stand in place....

To not flee....not bow down.

This image of standing tall is clear in the Biblical story that was shared this morning about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

To help put this story in perspective of the Biblical narrative... this was during the Jewish exile in Babylon...

You see after the great King David and the time where the Israelites formed an influential kingdom, they started to become

mismanaged...the kingdom split...became weaker and weaker until finally the Babylonians were able to defeat the southern kingdom of Judah and took the best and brightest Jews back to their homeland to be assimilated.

And that's where we meet these three young men and their friend Daniel.

Now, the story of the statue and the fiery furnace event is not the first time Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went against the grain of Babylonian society.

Keeping with their custom of being Kosher and abstaining from the things that the book of Leviticus says Jews can't eat, they rejected the food that was expected of members of the royal class.

This may not as dramatic as the story we have in front of us today...but that act defiance was also a huge deal.

Imagine for a second having your homeland taken over...but you are offered a chance to be in the top class of your new society.

You will continue to be educated...you will have comfortable living quarters....plenty of food to eat....respect from others...power...

That's not a bad life all things considered...

However, these 4 knew that the second they started drifting away from their religious principles....all would be lost.

The Jews no longer had a homeland in their possession...no temple....they had nothing but their God.

These young wise men knew that once they gave up their God...that absolutely everything would be lost.

So they chose to put their status...their comfort and their luxurious lives on the line....

And to make a long story short they made an agreement that they would eat only vegetables while the others ate all of the royal foods...and whoever was healthier and bigger after 10 days.... That would answer whether or not their Kosher lifestyle was acceptable for them to continue or not.

And, it turned out that after the 10 days they were healthier and as most of the biblical translations puts it “fatter” than their non-Kosher peers.

After this experience, Daniel through the interpretations of the king’s dreams is able to rise higher and higher in the Royal court and he brings Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego along for the ride.

So at the point of the story we had read for us this morning.... Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have even more to lose...not only are they being treated well but they have been appointed to oversee one the most important providences in the Empire.

They were rulers....governors....yet once again they knew that if they bowed down before that statue....if they walked away from the cause...if they applied for that discharge from the people of God that all would be lost....

And holding this scripture in front of us today...I can’t help but wonder what is at risk when we as the Church....bow down and submit to the injustices....the hate....the various “-isms” that we see today.

Friends, we as the church need to stand tall for our beliefs.

We can’t run away from or submit to what the culture around us is telling us to do....we need to stand for our Biblical Principles....the Principles that Jesus taught his disciples.

And the first step to doing that is knowing what those Christians principles are.

In the Early 2000s, a research group conducted a survey of self-pronounced Christians here’s what he found about their knowledge of

the Bible and got some surprising results.

- More than 40% could not name the four Gospels.
- 52% cannot identify more than three of Jesus' disciples.
- 60% of American Christians can't name even five of the 10 Commandments.
- 71% of American Christians think "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse.

The conclusion of the study said "Americans revere the Bible, but by and large they don't know what it says...."

And if I were to guess, I think those numbers wouldn't be much different today than back 10 years ago....perhaps they may be even worse.

We need to keep the knowledge of the Bible...especially the teachings of Jesus in front of us if we are going to be able to stand up for God's Love.

We need to examine and take seriously the way Jesus interacted with those in society who thought their way was better than God's way.

And it never ceases to amaze me how many times Jesus...teaches...debates...or offers Grace to others over a meal.

In small group conversation....in eating and drinking with others.

Sometimes...we have the greatest impact...we stand the tallest is when we sit down and have a meal with someone we haven't seen eye to eye with in the past.

Many of us are like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the sense that we are in place of influence.

Because of our education or our address or our experiences we have resources that cannot only be used to help us stand up for our beliefs...but also for those in our world who are oppressed.

Standing tall involves risk....and it seems like that risk feels even riskier when we are standing up not for ourselves...but for someone else.

When a person puts their comfort, their status, their rightful share on the line for someone else who society looks down upon...or someone who society villainizes....it is a big gamble.

I have come to believe that one of the riskiest things we can do is live out Jesus' command to love our enemies....

To pray for those who have persecuted you...

But standing in Love...in Solidarity with those who are oppressed or those who have been made out to be the enemy is one of the most powerful ways we can witness to God's amazing Grace.

The film *Glory* has a scene that illustrates the power of Solidarity that I would like to share with you now...

(SCENE 2: Tear it Up)

As the old motto goes...United we Stand or Divided we Fall.

Never underestimate the power that standing with those who are oppressed has.

Never underestimate the power that sitting with those who cannot stand has.

But still....we cannot forget that there is risk.

In our Story this morning, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego risked their lives and through a miracle were saved.

But if you know your history or have seen the end of the Film, you know that this African American unit...many of the 54th infantry gave their lives trying to take the Confederate Fort Wagner. A seemingly sad and hopeless ending....

However, we find in the closing narrative of the film that even though Fort Wagner was never taken by the Union Army, that the courage demonstrated by the soldiers of the 54th resulted in the Union accepting thousands of black men for combat, which President Abraham Lincoln credited with helping to turn the tide of the war.

(Intentional Pause)

I have to be honest....it has been a difficult week for me....actually looking back it has been a difficult past few months for me....and I think for all of us.

Because it can seem like every single place we look there is divisiveness. There is brokenness.

Perhaps it is because the media but I think it goes much deeper than that.

I think we are finding that people are ready to quickly walk away from another who has a different outlook than they do.

I think we are seeing people ready to villainize someone else based solely on the fact that they are registered in a different political party than their own.

Jesus gave us many beautiful examples of talking with those who saw things differently than he did.

Perhaps one of the greatest stands we can make is that through God's grace we can stay together and have a respectful conversation in the midst of our differences.

And while we don't have the time nor do I have the wisdom to tell you where all of the places are that God is calling you to take a stand, I want to encourage you to pray.....to read the scriptures...and to be on the lookout where you can offer and stand with God's power and love as we seek to live out one of the question that every United Methodist is asked in front of the congregation when they become a professing member of the church: *Do you accept the power and freedom to resist and stand up*

against evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they may present themselves?

It's a powerful question...one in which many of us have answered "I do."

I'd like to close things out this morning with a quote from Father Greg Boyle who is the founder and director of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles...

Homeboy Industries is the largest and most successful gang rehabilitation and re-entry program in the world. Homeboy offers an "exit ramp" for those stuck in a cycle of violence and incarceration.

Father Greg Says this: "The strategy of Jesus is not centered on taking the right stand on issues....but rather on standing in the right place---- with the outcast and those relegated to the margins."

May we go out and take a risk as we stand up for our faith....a faith that asks us to stand up for others.

Amen and Amen.