



## Sunday's Sermon from 6/7/2020

-Sunday June 7- "Lights, Cinema, Scripture: Becoming Documentary" (First Lesson: Psalm 8; Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20)

### **We are beginning a new summer sermon series entitled, "Lights, Cinema, Scripture!"**

Now the ethos behind this particular sermon series, stems from my time of pursuing my Masters of Divinity of Degree at Phillips Theological Seminary, located in Tulsa Oklahoma.

One of the classes that I took was called, "Theology in Films," which happened to be one of my favorite classes ever; First and foremost, this was because I absolutely LOVE watching movies, films and documentaries.

I love watching many genres of different movies as well; romance, thrillers, horror, some sci Fi, foreign films, inspirational documentaries and stories and more!

What made this class particularly fascinating was not just because the class consisted of us having to watch a list of movies prior to coming to class; versus reading hundreds of pages of books in a very short time period;

But what intrigued me the most, was the professor's claim that every movie has an element of theology in it; regardless of the genre; He revealed that within each movie or film, there would always be a character that symbolized God or have some biblical theme contained within in it; that are both intentional and often times deliberate; even if said film writer or director might identify as an atheist or agnostic.

From the professor's perspective it is inevitable; for him the claim was that there is a theological claim or foundation in there somewhere;

Whether the intent is to affirm a value or truth contained in scriptures or challenge it; the professor raised an awareness within myself and classmates; that made it difficult for many of us to watch a movie again; without considering some of these theological claims.

And I suppose the reason why I do buy into my professor's claim, is because it does echo this sentiment that I have preached in the past; that you and I are all spiritual beings just as much as we are human beings;

So perhaps when you and I are watching a film, documentary or movie; what we are witnessing, is a person or group of people work out their own ideologies, worldview and perspectives that will inevitably contain some element of spirituality; for this is part of who we are.

**So with that said; some of the many themes that are contained within the films, that might resemble biblical topics that we might read about in the Bible, are themes such as sin, redemption, salvation, forgiveness and the list goes on.**

And so the task for the class then, was to be able to name and identify some of those biblical based themes or God inspired characters and find scriptures that might correlate with them; so that the larger meaning of the film might be revealed— so that perhaps the worldview perspective might be clarified and even acted upon.

Therefore, this will be the same task for our summer sermon series.

You and I will note some important themes that are contained within both our lectionary scriptures and movies/films; that might help to shape and inform our current worldview perspectives; along with provide next steps for us to create and participate in a better world. And so with that, our gospel in Matthew today reveals a biblical theme of discipleship.

The essence of this scriptural text in fact contains the missional charge of the United Methodist Church; to *therefore go and make disciples of Jesus Christ; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit.*

But let's face it church, this charge in itself often creates a lot of recognized and sometimes unrecognized anxiety within a lot of us; upon hearing the preacher declare this.

Because often times, folks have no idea on actually how to do this.

In fact, I remember a sermon that Rev. David Lux preached when I was the associate at Saint Paul UMC here in Lincoln a few years back; and he said that the statistics of how often a person might invite someone to their church was like once out of 50 years or something along those lines.

And so normally church, when preachers attempt to teach their parishioners what does making disciples of Jesus Christ look like; we inform them that the first step to how we make disciples is to invite a person to church.

Seems reasonable enough right?!

Because the idea is that once that person actually accepts the invitation to your church, there will hopefully be something within the church community; whether it be the pastor or the sermon or the music or the fellowship or even the food that keeps them coming back for more.

The ethos behind inviting a person to church as a model for discipleship, involves basically demonstrating someone with radical love and hospitality, so much so, that it will be so irresistible to that individual, that they will keep coming back for more.

And so let me just say this; I do believe that this is a powerful and helpful first step towards making disciples of Jesus Christ I do.

However, if the statistics are still accurate as Rev. Lux preached in the past; and now you and I add the layer that we are all now in a pandemic situation where face to face church and worship is limited or eliminated temporarily; then the question becomes, is this the way you and I make disciples of Jesus Christ or not?

Furthermore, if folks still are not comfortable in inviting people to church, or only will statistically do so once every 50 years, then where does that leave all of us in our missional call and charge?

So in raising some of these questions and challenges, I believe that there is an embedded charge for all of us;

And that is to perhaps redefine what discipleship is, so that we might begin to develop a relevant model of how to achieve our missional charge within our church and community.

And we are going to do all of this in roughly 18 minutes or less...how does that sound?

### **And so what is a disciple?**

And so the typical response to this question as I have heard over the years, is that a disciple is one who follows Jesus Christ or one that commits to a life of intentionality in doing so.

And so if I am honest, this definition alone does not satisfy me entirely anymore...

For me the definition of being a disciple has evolved because to be honest, I have attended churches whose theology is simply not one size fits all as it pertains to Jesus.

In one particular church I attended in my early twenties, being a disciple of Jesus involved me ensuring that I wore panty hose at all times, very little makeup, minimal jewelry and no pants.

It wasn't until I branched out into my call, that I began to learn of a Jesus that was ok with me wearing makeup and skipping panty hoes as long as my mission was to serve the poor, hungry and marginalized.

So I say all of this to suggest that when we say being a disciple means to follow Jesus, perhaps this is not an easy definition for some of us to follow; depending on the church context; even though we are all reading from the same bible.

So with that said, a helpful definition that I came across in my study for this sermon, as it pertains to defining what a disciple is, defined it as; "*A disciple is not one who has already learned, but one who is always learning.*" .....Because the theological rationale is that The 'school-days' of a Christian are never over

Earle, R. (1966). The Gospel according to St. Matthew. In *Matthew-Acts* (Vol. 4, p. 123). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

So I don't know about you, but I can get behind that definition;

For in the story I have shared as it pertains to my own understanding of Jesus; if you apply that new definition of discipleship; one can see how I am learning and evolving.

I love this definition also because often times, a person usually is not eagerly and actively trying to make disciples of Jesus Christ, mainly because many of us do not feel that we are qualified to do so.

For if some of us do not consider ourselves for instance to be a bible scholar, then the pressure of inviting another person to read the

Bible as well, can be intimidating.

Or sometimes the task of leading someone to Christ can be daunting, if you and I may not be sure that we are on the correct path ourselves.

But alas, to define a disciple as one who is learning and always learning from my perspective is more invitational;

**And so with this new working definition, then the question becomes, how can you and I then invite someone into learning with us.**

And friends this is when I feel it the opportune time to reveal to you why the Holy Spirit invited me to have all of us watch the film or read the book *Becoming*; which is the memoir of former United States first lady Michelle Obama published in 2018.

Because first and foremost, the title in itself suggests a person who is learning and still learning....

For **becoming** does not mean that the person has arrived;

**Becoming** does not mean that the person has all of the answers;

**Becoming** does not from my perspective mean that the person necessarily is the expert;

Instead the idea of **becoming** in the context of this film/book; involves a person who is reflecting upon the life lessons they have learned; starting from their childhood until present day.

And essentially in Michelle Obama's journey, she was at a place in her life, where she had to rediscover her new purpose and identity, since she was no longer the First Lady of the United States.

Michelle Obama in her book/film is essentially inviting you and I and the world, to journey with her in her life chronicles and in this, she showed us all a lot of herself....

In fact from my perspective, her documentary film revealed a deep personal experience, where I found myself laughing with her, crying with her, rejoicing with her and at the end; just inspired to become my best self as a result.

In watching the documentary, I felt as if Michelle Obama was sitting at the table with me, face to face;

Furthermore, it was in her story that even though she did not ask of me in particular to do anything, I found myself wanting to do everything better.

I found myself celebrating the skin I was in, as I watched her minister and inspire other young women.

There was a portion in the documentary where a young African American teenage girl/young adult asked Michelle, *how is it that as a black woman, she overcame the stigma and feeling of being invisible.*

And it was when Michelle shared that she never felt invisible, because her mom and dad would never allow her to feel invisible; that I realized that this was the same gift that my parents gave to me. And so it was at that point in the film where I rejoiced at the reclaimed awareness that I was not invisible; regardless of the tension that surrounds me that may try to challenge this truth at times...

I would suspect that this reclaimed awareness resonated with many

others as well....

And that is when it struck me that this was the art of discipleship at its finest;

Where discipleship **involves the practice of every person who is learning how to become,**

So to expand this revelation; this model of discipleship invites others to join in a journey together of becoming; through the power of sharing their stories with one another; thereby helping not just ourselves but others to reclaim their identity through the eyes of God; And so you see this church, this and more is why I felt lead to invite us all to watch the film or read the book of Michelle Obama; is because what she was able to do through her story, was invite us all to reimagine how you and I might reclaim our own stories;

It was through her story where we see a new model of discipleship form.

You see the documentary/book invites us all to reclaim our own identity in the eyes of Jesus; thereby discovering our worth and value in Jesus.

So as Michelle Obama talks about her roots and how she found her voice, as well as her time in the White House, her public health campaign, and her role as a mother; what essentially she was doing was planting seeds of becoming within others as she revealed to the world her own becoming journey.

**Now with that said, I need to say there is a lot of political rhetoric and divisiveness going on within the world right now as it pertains to the police, race relations, movements for change and inclusion; government politics and so forth.**

And as a result, what I have noticed is that people as a whole are not being particularly kind to one another.

On social media in particular, I found myself literally exhausted with some of the conversations I had been engaging in as it pertains to Mr. Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, peaceful protests, riots and the list goes on.

There were some very passionate individuals who did not agree with some of my insights on some of the public forums I commented on. To be frank, there were a few that just wanted to engage me in a verbal, keyboard warrior sparring match and I need to say this church, I am not a warrior over the keyboard and behind the computer screen.

I am a lover of God and a warrior for the mission of ensuring that I do no harm in how I share God's love and light.

So to put it plainly, your spiritual leader will not get into sparring match with anyone....it serves no true purpose.

Especially when it is obvious that the other person's mindset is not open to hearing another perspective other than their own.

So this week church, it was obvious with the way a couple of individuals attempted to attack me verbally through social media and tell me who and whose I was statistically as a black woman in their eyes; one of those statistics was to list the criminal history of Mr. Floyd; to lift up black on black crime and to identify me as a black woman who most likely fell into the statistic of the Black population

that comprises of 50 percent of this countries criminal population; my response to those individuals was to tell them that I hear them and I appreciate their perspective;

I informed them that I would not get into a futile debate with them as it was clear that their mind was already made up about me and people who look like me; (based off of the gross assumptions and extrapolations of those assumptions that they made towards me) and I wished them a good night.

In fact as a side note I believe that my response to them was even biblical.

You see the Bible tells us in Luke 10 when Jesus told the disciples that the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few; in verse 5 it also says *when you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house. Then Jesus says, Go I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. V6 If someone promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you....Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you....*then jumping down to verse 10; *but when you enter a town where you are not welcomed, go into the streets and say, "Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you."*

So putting this passage into my own words, I don't spend time engaging with people who are not receptive to anything other than their own perspective and where I am not welcome.

I metaphorically dust my feet off towards these incidents and keep it moving....

And I pray that my non violent response of still treating those individual with respect and human dignity, might plant seeds of a softened heart later or not;

Either way, it preserves my class and strength and knowledge of who I am and whose I am in God's eyes...

Because as Michelle Obama's documentary reiterates again...I am not invisible...you are not invisible....

So in cases where someone's words might try to reflect that I am invisible, I disengage and pray for an open heart later for them.

So I share all of this and my experiences as the racial and political tensions rise in our country because in getting back to the story of Michelle Obama; the world knows that just as she is loved by many if not most; there is a section of people who would like to make her feel invisible for a myriad of reasons.

So my invitation for some of us in listening to this sermon online or perhaps in listening to Michelle Obama's story; who may not necessarily identify or even agree with some parts of her story or who she is; the invitation is to not get hung on the content of some of those things that may be creating real barriers for some, but to simply take in the over all message and meaning of her story;

That in applying her story with the gospel today,

**You and I are not just witnessing** the former First Lady...

**You and I are not just witnessing** someone who politically identifies as a democrat;

**You and I are witnessing** a woman who is announcing to the world that she is a disciple; a disciple of life who is learning daily;

**She is a disciple** who is aware that her learning never stops; that she must keep learning so that she can **become**;

**So that she may become** what the still small voice that I believe is the Holy Spirit **leads her to become**;

A woman who has cracked the code for what true discipleship is for today's time as I see it; which is not just the ability to invite someone to church; but a learning, evolving learner who is inspiring us all to become our greatest selves in God's love and light as well....

For many of us have been existing in this world barely visible along the margins....

So the invitation that our gospel invites us to consider and what Michelle Obama's documentary invites us to do, **is to become in such a way where we are now truly seen**;

For you and I are not Invisible....

But we are becoming.....

And if you and I subscribe to this type of learning experience and discovery, this is where the statement that I say a lot comes into fruition; *the best is yet to come!*

Let the Church say Amen!

Sincerely,

Kirstie Engel  
First UMC Lincoln  
4024661906

