

SERMON, Jan 1, 2017, Will Howell

Prelude

Hymn #

Greeting

Announcements

Examen

Part 1: Rogue One Introduction

Introduction: In a time of conflict, a group of unlikely heroes band together on a mission to steal the plans to the Death Star, the Empire's ultimate weapon of destruction. This key event in the Star Wars timeline brings together ordinary people who choose to do extraordinary things, and in doing so, become part of something greater than themselves.

As the shadows of the Empire loom ever larger across the galaxy, so do deeply troubling rumors. The Rebellion has learned of a sinister Imperial plot to bring entire worlds to their knees. Deep in Empire-dominated space, a machine of unimaginable destructive power is nearing completion. A weapon too terrifying to contemplate . . . and a threat that may be too great to overcome.

I don't know about you, but that description sounds a lot like what's going on in our world now! A sinister imperial plot to bring entire worlds to their knees? Um, yeah. A threat too great to overcome. That sure is what it feels like sometimes. But that's not the end of the story...

We use the word rogue today, not as the dictionary defines it, doing illegal and crazy things, but we use it in a more positive way, that to be rogue is to have ideas on how the world can change. It is based on hope for a better future. And it is willing to get involved.

Does this sound like the world we're living in now? There are threats around us, to our planet and to a good way of life. It takes ordinary people to do extraordinary things. This is the Rogue concept, to have hope and to resist the imperial powers that want to bring us to our knees. As Noam Chomsky said, "What matters is the countless small deeds of unknown people who lay the basis for the significant events that enter history. They're the ones who have done things in the past. They're the ones who will have to do it in the future." -Requiem for the American Dream

Video

Children's Moment

Music

Part 2: Rogue Church

Scripture: Acts 8:1b-8

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

4 Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word. 5 Philip went down to the city[a] of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah[b] to them. 6 The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, 7 for unclean spirits, crying

with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

I would argue that the early church was a kind of Rogue church. As we see it was being persecuted since Acts 8 for 300 years, maybe within a year after it was formed. It was illegal to gather as the church and so they held secret gatherings in homes and had secret symbols of their community. I would also add that it seems to me that the church under persecution was the best form of the church. What did they do as soon as Christianity became legal and accepted? The church got into politics and treated others as badly as it was treated for years.

But, this Rogue church did not give up. In the face of incredible odds against survival they did not just give up and disband the church since it was now illegal. Friends were being killed and that fact did not lessen their resolve. Instead, they went from place to place, shouting the good news, that God loves all people, including the severely messed up. The fact of the matter is that in the face of the empire (Roman empire not Imperial empire) the church had great joy. What? How could they have great joy? Because they were so convinced of their cause that nothing could break it. They had a great cause and hope which is the foundation of a Rebellion.

You know this is a pretty Rogue church. When I first looked at the website for Countryside and saw the Tri-Faith Initiative I was blown away. I didn't think any church would even consider such a move, let alone actually vote to approve it. Churches don't do that sort of thing. They don't associate with other religions. It takes a Rogue church to see the incredible value of that kind of relationship, that could just very well upset the religious / political structure of our society.

OR

In Acts 8, the church enters into a state of persecution that lasts almost 300 years. But, at the same time this church is joyous and is only concerned about preaching the gospel, the good news that God loves all people and that grace is what it is all about. This Rogue church is not in union with the political nature of those in power who seek to keep the status quo and keep an unbalanced structure of domination by the few against the masses. The Rogue church is about spreading the love of God, loving its enemies, and praying for those who persecute it

Reflection

Music

Part 3: Rogue Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-45

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

Jesus instructs his disciples about the nature of society. The rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you. Jesus is upsetting the status quo in

bringing a new system, where those who want to be great must be servants, where instead of hate, love of enemies will have the power to change the world. Was Jesus Rogue? If you look at the ways in which Jesus would not give in to the Jewish leaders or the Judean government, but insisted on establishing a more equitable system for the poor, it makes this definition of Rogue come alive.

. It is an entirely different concept from the system in place, much like another 600 years later when Muhammad received revelation for the Qu'ran. As a trustworthy, honest, and respected man, he receives instructions from God as to how to change a corrupt society. Arabia was ruled by the merchants, who were gathering wealth which led to power. The poor were overlooked and oppressed. Muhammad brought Islam to Arabia which had the implications of a new way to live, a spiritual way to live that would upset the political and economic structure of Arabia. This was the conflict, but Muhammad received support, and through his new Rogue religion was able to make massive changes to the whole area based on the spiritual disciplines contained in the Qu'ran.

But the single most Rogue idea that Jesus presented was love. Love your enemies. Wait, what? And pray for those who persecute you. Instead of an eye for an eye, the idea of revenge or that the punishment fits the crime, turn the other cheek, or take the plank out of your own eye. And, forgive as you have been forgiven. These are the concepts that will turn this world upside down.

Reflection

Communion: Rogue Supper :)

Pastoral Prayer / Lord's Prayer

Hymn

BBJ

Blessing "And may the force be with you..."

Postlude