***Faith at the Movies 5: The Fellowship of the Ring***

Scriptures: Various – see each theme

August 2, 2015

**SERMON SUMMARY**

*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is a film filled with symbols of faith. Just as Jesus used images and symbols as reminders for his followers, Christians through the ages have used symbol for many purposes throughout the history of Christianity. From the sign of the fish to point the way to Christian fellowship groups in the early church, to the cross, water, doves, loaves of bread and chalices, faith has rich symbolism that is intended to help us fix our hearts and minds on our faith as we go about our daily lives.

**A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation**

**A Prayer for Every Day:**  Eternal God, we praise you today, knowing you to be our strength, our shield, our rock and our courage. As we sang on Sunday, “lead us all our journey through and deliver us,” especially when we are confronted by the dangers and temptations along the path. Send us out on the mission quest to which you call us, offering our hearts and our lives in your service and for the good of your creation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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**Faith Symbols**

As this is a Communion Sunday and time is short, we will concentrate on just 4 symbols found in the film.

Many symbols in the Christian faith are *sacramental*, conveying deep meaning and connection with God whether they are directly connected with a sacrament.

* **Water.** In this film, there are a number of water scenes, and in at least 2 of them the characters are saved through the water, symbolizing the saving nature of the waters of Baptism. Water is the essential element for life, created on the First Day. Water cleanses, supports life, refreshes, heals. Jesus talked about Living Water that will keep us from ever being thirsty. Water runs through scripture and through our hymns and songs, sometimes acknowledging the danger that water may pose (“When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow.” From *How Firm a Foundation,* #529 UMH), refreshment, the thread of God’s love, gracious provision and goodness (the image of a river can be found in the scriptures from Genesis – such as the river in the Garden – through the river that runs through the City in The Revelation of John). How do the water scenes in *The Fellowship of the Ring* speak to you of God’s love, provision and saving grace?

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* **The Dangerous, Mysterious Forest/Wilderness.** In his book, *Faith Journey Through Fantasy Lands,* Russell Dalton writes:

In myths and fairy tales, forests are places that are full of unknown dangers and supernatural forces. Although heroes would rather avoid the mysterious dark forest, their paths often take them straight through the heart of it. Many scholars see these forests as symbols, representing the dark recesses of our unconscious mind and the mysterious aspects of the world in which we live. When heroes enter the dark forest, they are courageously facing the unknown. By successfully completing this part of their journey and emerging on the other side of the forest, they grow confident in their ability to face the unknown in the future…It is human nature to fear the mysterious forests of our lives. Facing uncertainty can be especially difficult for those who expect their religion to provide certainty about every aspect of life….The Christian faith teaches us that we live in mystery, and that we must come to accept that we do not know the future. (Scripture passages: Matthew 6:34; 24:36; Psalm 23:4)[[1]](#footnote-1)

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* **A Butterfly.** A powerful symbol of the Resurrection and new life for Christians is the butterfly. Visually connecting the butterfly’s emergence from the cocoon in new splendor after its life as a caterpillar to the resurrection of Jesus, his emergence from the tomb, the butterfly is also a symbol of how our new birth into the Christian life, the changing of our hearts as we grow in our knowledge and love of God, is a glorious transformation. In two powerful scenes in *The Fellowship of the Ring,* a butterfly hints at hope and then becomes the vehicle for new life for Gandalf, emerging at the time that all seems lost for him.

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* **Music used symbolically.** The musical score for *The Fellowship* is richly orchestrated, majestic, and beautifully harmonious. In a number of scenes, a theme runs through that has a phrase that is note for note the first line of the hymn, *This Is My Father’s World.* As you listen for that musical theme, note how it is used. What is the purpose the music is serving at those particular points in the film?

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**MONDAY THRU FRIDAY**

In your meditations this week, I suggest that you spend a lot of time reflecting on pictures and perhaps singing hymns and songs. Symbols are visual, not based on words. Here are some suggestions for your meditations:

* + Take some pictures of water and forests and butterflies.
  + Search on water, forests, and butterflies in an online image search engine.
  + Sing or listen to some water songs:
    - *Wade in the Water*
    - *I’ve Just Come From the Fountain*
    - *As the Deer Pants for the Water*
    - *When Peace, Like a River, Attendeth My Way*
    - *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*
  + Write as many words for “water” as you can think of. Consider how the symbol changes with each word. What meaning does it take on for you in each of its forms? How does that meaning connect with your spiritual life? (You may do this exercise for every symbol mentioned this week.)
  + Using crosswalk.com or biblegateway.com, search for scripture references to forests (wilderness, wood) or water. What insights come from the scripture in reference to this symbol of faith?

*Hymn of Promise*

Natalie Sleeth

1 In the bulb there is a flower;

in the seed, an apple tree;

in cocoons, a hidden promise:

butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter

there’s a spring that waits to be,

unrevealed until its season,

something God alone can see.

2 There’s a song in every silence,

seeking word and melody;

there’s a dawn in every darkness,

bringing hope to you and me.

From the past will come the future;

what it holds, a mystery,

unrevealed until its season,

something God alone can see.

3 In our end is our beginning;

in our time, infinity;

in our doubt there is believing;

in our life, eternity.

In our death, a resurrection;

at the last, a victory,

unrevealed until its season,

something God alone can see.

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~ Rev. Vivian McCarthy, Pastor

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August 2, 2015

1. Dalton, Russell W., *Faith Journey Through Fantasy Lands: A Christian Dialogue with Harry Potter,* Star Wars, *and* The Lord of the Rings. Copyright © 2003 Russell W. Dalton. Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis. Pages 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)