



ELIZABETHTOWN  
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*God at the Movies, Flops:  
The Spark Within*

Matthew 10.24–28

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## **MATTHEW 10.24–28**

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*A student doesn't get a better desk than her teacher. A laborer doesn't make more money than his boss. Be content—pleased, even—when you, my students, my harvest hands, get the same treatment I get. If they call me, the Master, 'Dungface,' what can the workers expect?*

*Don't be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open, and everyone will know how things really are. So don't hesitate to go public now.*

*Don't be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul.*

### **TALK ABOUT A FLOP**

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Jesus wants his followers to know that at times, the going will get tough. And when they do, who we are, how true we stay to the call will determine success. But we're not talking about successes, in this series we're talking about flops. Here's a doozy. The following appeared in the Redwood Falls Gazette in tiny Wabasso, MN:

“Kathleen Dehmlow Schunk was born on March 19, 1938 to Joseph and Gertrude Schunk.... She married Dennis Dehmlow...in 1957 and had two children Gina and Jay. In 1962 she became pregnant by her husband's brother Lyle Dehmlow and moved to California. She abandoned her children, Gina and Jay who were then raised by her parents Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Schunk. She passed away on May 31, 2018 in Springfield and will now face judgment. She will not be missed by Gina and Jay, and they understand that this world is a better place without her.”

Ouch. Obviously one-sided and rooted in a lot of pain, Kathleen Dehmlow Schunk was a flop, in the eyes of her children.

2 In our movie of the day, *Thor: Ragnarok*, true to Norse mythology, the characters are supremely concerned with their legacies or measure of success. Thor, god of thunder and lightning, always identifies himself as “Thor son of Odin.” And success is measured by how they serve and protect their people, humanity. The villain, on the other hand, is concerned with only ego, vengeance and power. We’re not going to talk about whether this movie is a flop or success, but how we think about serving with courage and care.

### **REFLECT ON TIME WITH FAMILY**

A couple of weeks ago I was on vacation—back home to Arizona to see my family, and in Southern California to meet my new nephew, son to Karin’s brother. I don’t know about you, but when I go back home I tend to do a lot of reflecting.

Familiar places remind you of some of the best and the worst. We laugh about it now, but I showed my kids the hospital I was at when after I was run over by that van. Driving by my High School alma mater the memories come flooding back. *That’s where I was bullied by that senior. That’s where I bullied a sophomore. That was Mr. Randall’s office where I learned an important life lesson. I was standing right there when...and so on.*

But deeper than that are the memories about who I thought I would be at this stage in life or later. *Who did you want to be? How did you want to be? How did you see your life unfolding? Where did you set your sights? Certainly none of us wanted to be a flop. Would we be a success?*

For me this trip home brought a new reality. My aunt, who suffers from Alzheimer’s, now lives in a full time care facility. It was the first time I had been to my aunt and uncle’s house without her there. This gave me pause to think about

the times in my life when she was there for me as my mother battled cancer and eventually died. Though these days she's a foggy reflection of her former self, she was a success. In my world she is a success because she cared and she had the courage to enter a difficult situation when she could have done the bare minimum.

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How will our children and children's children and nieces and nephews look back on us? As individuals. But also—throwing the circles wider, as a congregation, as a country, as a world? Will they view us as those who had courage? Those who cared? I'm not terribly reactive or big on hyperbole, but don't think it is hyperbole to say that we face some of the most important moments in our denomination and our country. When the time comes to write the obituary for this decade or time period in history, how will it read? Will we be viewed as a success, or a flop?

Sadly, what I see whether we are talking about our denomination or country is a profound lack of courage and kindness, especially among our leaders.

I also believe this is a pivotal moment in this congregation's history. We are strong, loving—we care. Are we also courageous and passionate?

In all of these cases, national, denominational, congregational, it is challenging to see beyond what is right in front of us, to imagine that God has given us the tools and the strength to lead a change, or love without restraint, or to take a risk for the future.

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In the clip we're about to see from the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*, Thor is flopping big time. He is losing a battle for his

4 homeland and people. He is trapped, tortured, just lost an eye and sees no hope of victory. His iconic hammer—the tool he has relied upon—has been destroyed. He’s grieving the death of his father, feels like a failure because homeland, Asgard is about to be destroyed. Then he has a vision. This is that vision with his father.

Do any of Thor’s objections sound familiar to us?

- The forces against us are too powerful.
- I don’t have the tools.
- I don’t think I have the strength.

To which the great God replies:

- You think the forces against you are too powerful? You’re only seeing half the picture.
- And you have all the tools you need—you have the great spark within.
- You don’t think you have the strength—You are meant to serve and you’re stronger than you think.

So what am I getting at here? Am I talking about national policies? Yeah. Am I talking about our family dynamics? That too. Along with denominational and global politics. What protects humanity? What honors the spark of divinity that shines within everyone? How do we tap into God, our ultimate source of strength?

Don’t be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open, and everyone will know how things really are. So don’t hesitate to go public now.

Don’t be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There’s nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. [Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands.]

Like I said during Children's Time: we can all help and ask for help. We don't have to be gods or superheroes to be great and serve with courage and care.

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