



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*God at the Movies, Flops:
A Wrinkle in Time*

Matthew 5.14–16; John 1.3b–5

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“DEAR MR. DISNEY”—

1

That’s how a 10-year-old girl named Catherine began her letter to the most powerful man in movies during the unsettling final months of 1963. She had experienced that year’s traumas like most children do, through the anxious whispers of adults, and a cloud of despair weighing heavily on the country. She was living through the Kennedy/Kruschev era—perhaps not all that unlike the times that we are living today.

According to an article in *Time* magazine, Catharine wanted to tell Mr. Disney about a book that had given her hope, one she thought could do the same for millions of other kids who felt the world around them darkening. If only he would make this story into a film. But she never sent the letter, nor did she forget it. Three years later, when Walt Disney died of lung cancer, she was inconsolable. Not only was the maestro of the *Mouse House* gone, but she couldn’t think of anyone else who could make that movie. So, she resolved to do it herself one day.¹

Fifty-four years later, producer Catherine Hand, that 10-year old girl of the 60’s, has done just that! *A Wrinkle in Time*, a Disney movie based on Madeleine L’ Engle’s novel of the same name, premiered in theaters on March 9, just a few months ago.

It was, however, a bit of a surprise. If not a flop, it was at least a disappointment. After all, it was based on a beloved children’s classic, and it featured the triumvirate of Hollywood dynamos: Reese Witherspoon, Mindy Kaling and the literally larger-than-life Oprah Winfrey, as three characters who represent good in the world. The first weekend the film made just over \$33 million on a \$103 million budget. While \$33 million is nothing to sneeze at, most likely the project will lose money once marketing costs are factored

¹Time, December 25, 2017.

2 in. According to the Hollywood Reporter, the movie is Disney's first major box office miss in two years.

This may have been in part due to less than glowing reviews before the movie even hit the big screen for the public's viewing. It received a 42% score on Rotten Tomatoes. Bad reviews, before a movie even premieres, are a real turn off to the public. Maybe the odds were just stacked against it before it ever got out of the gate.

So why did I choose this movie as part of this sermon series, *God at the Movies*? Especially since I am, admittedly, not so much of a sci-fi or fantasy fan? My esteemed colleagues find it incredulous that haven't joined the Trekkie ranks over the years. In fact, I haven't even seen any of the numerous *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* movies, or *Back to the Future 1,2 or 3*. And don't let the cat out of the bag, but I probably won't camp out to attend the opening of the next sci-fi mega-hit! I like movies, especially now that we qualify for senior prices! But even at the reduced rates, I'm careful how I invest my time. So this film was decidedly something new and different and stretching for me—I wanted to broaden my world!

Another reason I choose this movie is that I was curious. The book is a classic. Since winning the 1963 Newbery Medal, it has sold upwards of 16 million copies. L'Engle has become, for many who struggle with faith and doubt, a kind of patron saint for the wavering, the wondering and the wounded. I had not read this particular book before and was willing, if not eager, to find out what the story is all about.

And there's one more reason that this movie was a good choice, although I only learned this after choosing it and doing some homework. This movie can be credited with empowering and showcasing the abilities and skills of women. The book upon which the movie was based was written by

a woman. The film features a female lead in a sci-fi/fantasy world, which apparently is rare. The movie was adapted for the screenplay by a female. The director is female. And the movie even takes it a step further by putting women of color in some of the main roles. It's a beautiful portrait of diversity and empowerment.

There was one man's name that I kept seeing time and again, however. The co-producer was a man named Jim Whitaker, but it's not our Jim Whitaker—their names are spelled differently

So...here's the story in a nutshell. Meg Murry is the story's teen protagonist. Meg is a typical middle school student struggling with issues of self-worth and who just wants to fit in. The daughter of two world-renowned physicists, she is intelligent and uniquely gifted although she hasn't realized it for herself yet. Along with her brother and friend, Meg's on a quest to find her missing scientist father trapped behind a dark force (IT) in the universe. She is sent a triad of angelic beings, the Mrs's: Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which. The Mrs. Trio teaches Meg and her companions how to fold, or wrinkle, the space-time continuum so that they can skip from galaxy to galaxy, planet to planet, a concept called tessering. It is in these worlds beyond their imagination where they must confront a powerful evil force. To make it back home to Earth, Meg must also face the darkness within herself in order to harness the strength necessary to defeat the darkness rapidly enveloping the Universe.

So for this *God at the Movies* series, we ask where is God in all of this? What can we learn of God in *A Wrinkle in Time*? I've found, given that this story was created by L'Engle who wrote through a Christian lens, that there are so many themes, so many places where it can "hook" us. We could consider the nature of evil. Or look again at what it means

4 to be courageous. Perhaps individuality vs. conformity captures our imagination or we could reflect on the beauty of nature—the cinematography, especially of the numerous galaxies, is stunning. We could ponder the intersection of faith and reason or revisit the all-to-common struggle of learning to love oneself. For all of these qualities can be found in this story. And they are indeed issues of faith.

This morning, I want to briefly explore just one theme that is woven throughout the movie and one that's familiar to us, as followers of Jesus. It's the battle between the forces of light and darkness, or good and evil. In the movie, the evil is represented metaphysically by the "dark thing," and it manifests in the physical forms of the man with red eyes and what is known as IT, kind of a large and scary, living-breathing mass that has tentacles that wind and weave in all directions. The representatives of light, embodied by the characters of the story, are perpetually involved in a struggle against darkness. The love the characters share with one another is stronger than anything the forces of darkness can muster and the light of that love shines in the darkness. And that resonates for us!

Hear these familiar words from the Sermon on the Mount:

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous father and mother in heaven.
~Matthew 5.14–16 (The Message)

Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness, the darkness couldn't put it out. ~John 1.3b-5

We are to let our light shine, and the source of that light is Jesus!

Jesus' audience would have fully understood this teaching in a way that maybe we can't. While we have lamps and lights in every room of our homes, in those days, lamps were small. Yet even in a dark one room house in Palestine, just that small lamp "gives light to all in the house." A small lamp can make a significant difference in dispersing the darkness. Figuratively speaking, even the light of one person or even the light of one congregation or a small and perhaps, struggling denomination, can illumine an entire house.

What does it look like to be "the light of the world?" For Meg in this movie, it looked like courageously tessering the universe to find her father and to rescue him with the "light" of her love.

For those of us who haven't learned how to tesser yet, what does it look like to embody that love that lights the world, that brings light even to the darkest corners? In this scripture, Jesus doesn't say think about it, he doesn't say you will be, may be, or try to be light. We ARE light and this light is not to be hidden. Being light is inherent in who we are as people of God, as disciples of Jesus. And this teaching, "you are the light of the world," in the original language, assumes a plural you—the faith community. We are the light of the world, whose purpose it is to be the mirror that refracts God's light so that all people and nations can know of God's justice, mercy and God's love. We are light

6 when, as a faith community we learn to live more and more fully our call to practice peace, service and openness to all.

Jesus says here that we will be seen—others will notice that...

- We are followers of Jesus.
- That we honor those who are most vulnerable; the poor, the sick, the very young, the very old, those with challenges.
- We welcome the immigrant, the refugee, the stranger, as if we were welcoming Jesus himself.
- We work for fairness and justice. We lift up people of all religions, races, nationalities, people of different genders.
- Maybe we even dress in black each Thursday as we stand against the darkness and evil of rape and violence and we post pictures on Facebook, indicating our solidarity with the vulnerable.
- We step out in faith as we consider building renovations and expansion to ensure that the next generations will have a facility here to enable the ministries to which they are called.
- Perhaps we come together with sisters and brothers at Annual Conference and be the peacemakers we are called to be, knowing that we don't have to agree on everything to be light.
- We live in hope.

There's a bit of a twist in this story, when Meg and her companions are preparing to tesser toward "IT" — that dark place where evil and chaos rule and where Meg's father was held captive, the three Mrs. told them that they could

no longer go with them, but would give them something to help them on their journey of bringing light to the darkest of places.

They were given the advice to stay together, to work together and draw strength from one another! They were given a pair of magical spectacles to help them see through “a different lens.” And most intriguing, Meg was given the gift of “her faults.” By presenting Meg’s faults as strengths, Mrs. Whatsit offers Meg a new way of perceiving herself, a new way of perhaps letting her light shine. The very things that got Meg into trouble at home—her stubbornness and headstrong behavior—turned out to be her strengths, upon which she drew to do good and to overcome evil. It turns out that it was all a matter of perspective.

And I love that twist. And I wonder—do I, do we, have what we perceive as faults, that once we embrace them, as we bring them into the light, they can serve us well? Maybe that’s our take-away with this film...something to keep us thinking in the days ahead. And that’s no flop!

We are here to be light, bringing out the God-colors of the world. And so I’m gonna let my light shine, and you’re gonna let it shine and you’re gonna let it shine, and you’re gonna let it shine and together...we’re gonna let it shine.

