

## “For the Journey”

- Rev. Dave Crawford, August 1/20



In a deeply theological scene from Martin Scorsese’s 1988 movie “The Last Temptation of Christ”, based not on the gospels but rather a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis (1955), an imagined conversation takes place between the Apostle Paul (played by Harry Dean Stanton) and Jesus (played by Willem Dafoe). The encounter occurs during the lengthy “dream sequence” of the story during which a crucified but still alive Jesus imagines what his life might be like if he came down off the Cross. In this dream scene a late-middle aged Jesus is out enjoying the day with his large family. He hears a street preacher not too far away and is drawn to the little event. It is Paul the apostle, preaching to a small crowd about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus is not pleased and an argument ensues. It’s an interesting scene, and completely fictional since Jesus and Paul never met (of course the Damascus Road encounter some 20 years after Jesus’ death did occur, between the risen Christ and Saul, soon to become Paul). The scene is about 6 minutes long and can be found on Youtube, or simply watch the entire movie.



The “Paul” portrayed by actor Stanton in the film is a passionate, somewhat gifted public speaker, which is perhaps not exactly authentic given Paul’s confession in Scripture of his difficulty with public speaking. Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest Paul possessed a speech impediment (2 Cor. 10:7-11; 2 Cor. 11:6; 2 Cor. 12:7-9). Yet I’m always amazed that Paul, the writer of most of the New Testament, despite his personal struggles and limitations, and despite the sufferings he endured in preaching Christ crucified and risen, persisted to the end, even his own martyrdom, buoyed by the promise of grace and new life, God’s gift.

The times in which we’re living call for such commitment, passion and faith. The times in which we’re living are indeed precisely why God chose to take on human flesh in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet are we capable of the dedication of someone like Paul? To believe and to live always in the light of the Cross and Empty Tomb? Movies about Jesus can be entertaining, provocative, spiritually and intellectually engaging. The New Testament proclamatory writings about Jesus, the risen Christ, while indeed provocative, engaging, are for us God’s Word of new life, hope and peace in troubled times. Life around the world and right outside the door is exceedingly challenging in 2020, and is where the rubber meets the road regarding faith and life. I urge you to turn to the Word, turn to prayer, turn to online worship to maintain and nourish Hope in the midst of uncertainty and pandemic, for as Paul writes in Philippians, “The Lord is near.”

Grace and Peace, friends. Dave.



*“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

- Romans 8:31-35, 37-39