

Reel Faith Sermon Series
Field of Dreams – Acts 2:1-21
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I want to read you the first paragraph of an article written by Jeff Huston, an online movie critic. He says, “If someone were to ask me about how God speaks, or how He guides and leads His followers, I wouldn’t exegete Scripture, unpack theology, or even offer up my own personal experience. Instead, the best answer I could give them would be to simply say this: Watch *Field of Dreams*.” That’s from Huston’s post titled, “Why *Field of Dreams* is the Best Christian Parable in Movie History.”

What in the world would a movie about a guy who builds a baseball field in the middle of Iowa have to do with Christianity? Well, more than you might think. This summer, we’re looking at how God speaks to us through the medium of popular movies. We may want to limit God and say that God only speaks through the Bible or through creation, but the God I worship is a creative God who can use any conduit – even movies – to get a message to us.

On Pentecost, the church’s birthday, we remember the story I just read, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the disciples and they begin speaking in foreign tongues. This moment becomes the launching point for the spreading of the gospel, leading to a split from the Jews and the creation of what we now know as Christianity. Today, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But what IS the Holy Spirit? That question has confounded scholars for centuries. Theologians have filled thick books that I probably should have read with theories about who the Spirit is and what she does, but one of the characteristics of the Spirit is that it defies explanation. We kind of know God, we definitely know Jesus, but the Holy Spirit? It is unseen, unpredictable, undefinable. And that scares us a little. You know, it’s only two letters and a couple of snakes from “Pentecost” to “Pentecostal.”

In the Bible, the Spirit is described in many ways: an advocate, a comforter, an interceder. One of the ways the Spirit is defined is as a guide, providing direction for those who are seeking to follow Jesus. Many times in scripture, it is the Spirit who leads Jesus’ followers to do what God is calling them to do. And, more often than not, that thing God is calling them to do is something they don’t want to do, or conventional wisdom says that shouldn’t do.

That brings us to our movie today. In *Field of Dreams*, Kevin Costner plays Ray Kinsella, who’s just bought a farm and moved to Iowa with his wife and daughter. Ray is haunted by his strained relationship with his now-dead father and his challenge of paying the monthly bills with what he earns from the farm. One day, while walking through the cornstalks, he hears a voice say to him, “If you build it, he will come.” Ray thinks he’s hearing things until the voice says again, “If you build it, he will come.” He tells his wife about the voice, who asks, “If you build what, who will come?” Ray answers, “He didn’t say.” She says, “I hate when that happens.” That night, Ray is awakened by the same voice, so he steps to the window, looks out at his farm, and asks, “Build what? What is this?” His wife wakes up and asks him what he’s doing. “It’s OK, honey. I’m just talking to the cornfield.”

It turns out Ray is supposed to build a baseball field in the middle of his corn, the crop that helps him pay the bills. Against everyone’s advice, he does just that, still not sure who is supposed to come. One night, while arguing with his wife over their dwindling finances, their daughter interrupts and says, “Daddy, there’s a man on your lawn.” Ray goes outside and finds a

long-dead ballplayer named “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, who was banned from baseball for cheating during the 1919 World Series. Jackson and his teammates, all of whom were banned from baseball, walk out of the corn to play ball on Rays’ field. It’s a moment of redemption for them.

The voice isn’t done with Ray. It calls to him find a reclusive author and a small-town doctor and brings them to his baseball field because each has unfinished business that the magical field will allow them to complete. Each of them finds a moment of purpose and clarity on that field. In the course of this strange ordeal, Ray’s sanity is continually questioned by people who think his grain elevator doesn’t go all the way to the top. At one point, while at the feed store, he asks a fellow farmer if he’s ever heard voices in his field. Someone else overhears and says, “Who’s hearing voices?” “Ray is!” And Ray has to backpedal so that people don’t think he’s even crazier than he already appears to be.

I hate to tell you this, but that’s what listening to the Spirit will do to you. If you dare to listen and submit to what God is calling you to do, you might come across as a little crazy. You heard of this guy, Noah? Imagine how his neighbors reacted to seeing a giant boat in his backyard. “You’re building WHAT? Weather.com doesn’t show any rain in the forecast.” Or how about Moses, who’s told to leave his shepherding job to take on the most powerful man in the world and demand that he release the Israelites? “So let me get this straight. A talking bush that was on fire told you to go challenge the Pharaoh?” Or how about Jesus’ disciples? What do you think their wives said when the disciples shared what they heard Jesus say? “Honey, I need you to catch fish to help us pay the bills, not follow some traveling preacher who claims he’s God.” The Spirit doesn’t call us to do things that make sense. But, nevertheless, it calls us.

In *Field of Dreams*, God is never mentioned. We’re never told the Voice that Ray hears is the Holy Spirit. And yet, the Voice and the Holy Spirit operate very similarly. Listen to Jeff Huston again: “This is how I’ve experienced God speaking and leading. He coaxes and compels, mystically and in mystery, not spelling out details but just giving the necessary morsel in a spiritually profound way, at a time I’m ready to hear it (though likely not understand it). Every time I watch *Field of Dreams* and see how The Voice speaks to Ray, and how Ray responds (both in compulsion and frustration), I recognize it thinking, ‘Yep, that’s exactly how God works’.”

I’ve never heard the Voice directly. Not literally like Ray, but in other ways, like when a pastor’s wife said to me, “You should consider going to seminary.” You want me to do WHAT? I was already enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Ohio University. Why would I want to give that up to go to seminary? Have you heard a voice, felt a nudge, been pulled to do something a tad bit crazy, and said, “I’m supposed to do WHAT?” That could be the Spirit speaking.

Here’s one way to know. The Spirit never calls us to do something just for ourselves. Ray struggles with this in the movie. He faithfully follows the Voice’s leading, building the field, going on road trips, doing everything he’s called to do, at the risk of losing his farm and jeopardizing his family’s safety. As he puts it, “Until I heard the Voice, I’d never done a crazy thing in my whole life.”

But, at one point, Ray realizes everyone else he is helping is benefitting from his sacrifice, but he isn’t. When he’s not invited to join the ballplayers on the magical field that he built, Ray explodes. “Now, just wait. I’ve done everything that I’ve been asked to do! I didn’t understand it, but I’ve done it, and I haven’t asked once, ‘What’s in it for me?’” A player says, “What are you saying, Ray?” He answers, “I’m saying...what’s in it for me?” The player responds, “Is that why you did this, Ray? For you?”

Why do you follow Jesus? Why do you follow God, doing the things God calls you to do? Why do you give up your time on a Sunday morning, why do you give away your hard-earned money, why do you align yourself with this community of faith when a good portion of society says you're deluding yourself with a supernatural fairy tale? Do you do these things to make yourself feel better? Or is there more to it?

When the Spirit calls us, it's never to do something for ourselves. It's to do something that will benefit others, even if it means we have to sacrifice. This world calls us to do things that only benefit ourselves, to spend more and buy more and get more, but if we all followed that voice, only those of us who have the means to follow will benefit. But if we follow God's voice, which calls us to love extravagantly and give generously and serve selflessly, then we all benefit. As Huston writes, "The Voice doesn't call you to your bliss; it calls you to others' burdens."

God doesn't call us to do things just for ourselves. But in following the voice of the Spirit, we learn that as we serve others, we ourselves are blessed. God's Spirit is here, present, among us, calling us forward to do something courageous and faithful and maybe even a bit crazy. What would that be for you? It might be telling a Worship and Wonder story to a group of kids. Does that sound crazy to you? Or maybe you're being called to step up in leadership at church or at work. Does that make you sweat a little bit? Maybe God is nudging you to consider fostering a child or taking a job with a non-profit or - gasp! - going into ministry. Crazy, right?

I don't know what you're being called to do. But I do know you're being called to do something because God loves us too much to let us stay where we are. It's easy to miss the Voice amidst all the other voices clamoring for our attention. It's easy to dismiss the Voice as just some crazy notion, some pie-in-the-sky idea that you could never really do. But if we learn anything from Ray Kinsella, it's that obeying the voice can not only help others find grace, but it can shower grace on us, as well. So, what is the Spirit saying to you?