

At the Movies

Bridge of Spies

March 12, 2017

Song: Great God Who Saves

Song: Fierce

**>SETUP Video Clip 1 - 1050s: The
Threat of Nuclear War (.8 mins)**

Introduction

How many of you have ever heard of “The Cold War?” The clip you just saw pretty much sums up the feelings and fears of American school children and their parents during the Cold War years

from 1947 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The Cold War was a time of political and military tension after World War II between the Eastern Bloc powers (namely Soviet Russia and its satellite states) and the Western Bloc (the United States and its NATO allies).

The term "cold" was used because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the US and the Soviet Union, even though they opposed each other in subtle, less obvious ways.

During this time period, the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation had a great impact on American life. People built bomb shelters. They practiced attack drills, like "Duck and

Cover”, in schools and other public places. There was an epidemic of popular films filled with nuclear devastation and mutant creatures.

There was also a strong anti-communist sentiment led by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and Senator Joseph McCarthy. Americans became convinced that they were not only threatened by atomic war, but also by communists within their own government. It’s no understatement that the Cold War was a constant presence and threat in the everyday lives of Americans.

There’s probably not a better movie out today that depicts the anxiety and

sentiments of Americans during the Cold War than the movie, Bridge of Spies. How many of you have seen it? Bridge of Spies is an historical account of some of the most dramatic events of 1957 concerning...

pics of Jim Donovan and Rudolf Abel

...trial lawyer Jim Donovan and convicted Soviet spy Rudolf Abel. Not only does this movie depict the drama of international espionage, but it also provides us with some powerful metaphors regarding (1) the mission of the church, (2) the people who accomplish this mission and (3) the underlying motivation that drives all

that they do. I'm excited to get into the particulars of this movie, so let's begin.

Basic Storyline

In 1948, a well-trained Soviet intelligence agent arrived in the United States and set up an artist's studio in Brooklyn, NY as a cover. While his real name was William Fisher, he would become best known as Rudolf Abel. And on June 21, 1957, after spending several years relaying top secret messages to the Soviets, Abel is captured. Let's watch.

>Video Clip 2 - FBI captures Abel (2.5 mins)

Abel is arrested by the FBI and after refusing to cooperate with the U.S. government, he is charged with multiple counts of espionage and assigned a lawyer. As you might have guessed, defending a Soviet spy wasn't a sought-after assignment in the 1950s. But the Brooklyn Bar Association knew just the man for the job: James B. Donovan.

>Video Clip 3 - Donovan asked to defend Abel (1.3 mins)

Not exactly an assignment most people would undertake, but Jim Donovan wasn't like most people. He was different. He believed that everyone, even a suspected spy, deserved a

vigorous defense. In October 1957, supported by another lawyer, Donovan scrambles to get ready for Abel's trial.

The evidence found against Abel in his studio was overwhelming: shortwave radios, maps of U.S. defense areas and numerous hollowed-out containers such as nickels with microfilm inside. Despite Donovan's attempts to explain away the evidence, Abel was convicted on all three counts of espionage on October 25, 1957.

After his conviction, Abel faces a potential death sentence for transmitting strategic information to a foreign country. Donovan now has to fight for his client's life. Watch the

drama in the courtroom as Judge Mortimer Byers hands down the sentence to Abel and pay attention to what Abel says to Donovan when it's over.

>Video Clip 4 - Abel sentenced by judge (1.5 mins)

Obviously, not everyone in the courtroom agreed with the sentencing. But Donovan convinced the judge that it might be a good idea to keep a spy around so that if a high ranking American is captured by the Russians, an exchange of prisoners through proper channels might be in the best interest of the United States.

Donovan not only convinced the judge that Abel was worth keeping around, but he also demonstrated to Abel that even Abel, an enemy of the United States, was worth fighting for.

After a failed appeal, it looked like Abel might spend decades in prison. But shortly thereafter, U-2 spy plane pilot Francis Gary Powers is shot down over the Soviet Union. The Soviets capture and convict him of espionage and throw him into prison.

Soon after Powers was captured, there is talk that the U.S. government is also willing to exchange Abel for Powers. However, someone is needed to hammer out the details. Jim Donovan is called upon to negotiate the swap.

While in Europe on his way to meet with the Soviets in East Berlin, a kink in the prisoner swap surfaces. US officials tell Donovan that while Powers is the priority, there's an American student named Frederic Pryor who is facing trial in East Germany for spying and they might want to exchange him instead Powers.

Watch Donovan's reaction when he finds out there are potentially two US prisoners in need of rescuing, not just one.

>Video Clip 5 - The prisoner swap discussion (2.0 mins)

After arriving in West Berlin, Donovan

makes daily crossings into East Berlin, where he faces a gauntlet of border guards, street gangs and East German police on different occasions. But it's his unproductive negotiations with both Soviet and East German representatives that are the most frustrating.

At one low point, East German lawyer Wolfgang Vogel presents an offer to exchange the grad student Pryor for Abel, with no release of the U-2 pilot Powers.

After numerous negotiations and counter proposals, all sides finally reach an agreement and the exchange of prisoners takes place on February 10, 1962, on the Glienicke Bridge, which connects East and West Germany.

Obvious Lessons

Now, I want to focus the rest of my time today on what this movie illustrates regarding three main points: Jesus' mission for the church, the people who accomplish this mission and the underlying motivation that drives all that they do.

In last week's message, Rick said that the church is called the Body of Christ because it's made up of many living parts, called "members" in the Bible. These "members", or Christ followers, are like arms, legs and feet, and eyes. They are all different but all important. Collectively they make up the church, which is filled people who have diverse,

yet essential gifts and abilities. We also learned from the movie “Zootopia”, that

the church isn’t “utopia”

the church isn’t “utopia” like a lot of people think or expect when they arrive. Rather, it’s “zootopia”. In other words, it’s more like a zoo... a messy, stinky place where some of the animals are downright mean and scary. Every church, the early church, even OUR church is filled with people who have messy lives.

Our collective “sins” are smelly, stinky and often unpleasant to be around. Look around you at this “zoo” of people. We are all a bunch of stinky, smelly sinners.

But that's not all we are. For those of us who have put our faith in Christ, the church is also a collection of "saints", that is, people who have been forgiven and saved by grace, and trust in Jesus Christ and not themselves to live the Christian life.

The Mission of the Church

Let's push pause and think about this question: If the church is filled with people who are "100% sinners and yet also 100% saints", what is a messy group of people supposed to do? What is our collective mission? What does Jesus want to accomplish through us together, as a whole? I believe that our collective

mission as the Body of Christ, as a church filled with imperfect people who have been saved by grace, is...well, let's let Jim Donovan tell us.

**>Video Clip 6 - Every person matters
(2.1 mins)**

In the clip we just saw, Jim Donovan tell us the three word mission of the church. It's very simple, yet very profound. It's not hard to understand but extremely challenging to fulfill.

“Every person matters.”

This is an overarching theme or common thread that weaves itself in

and out of almost every scene in the movie. And this is also the all-consuming mission and vision of the church of Jesus Christ, North Heartland included: Every person matters.

In the movie, there's a scene where Jim Donovan explains to a CIA agent the basis and foundation for his belief in the value and worth of every individual. During the discussion, he quotes the second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence which says,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Where did this idea originate from? Not from Jim Donovan and not even from our founding fathers. It came from God. You see the bible that tells us that all men and women are created equal and have been given unalienable rights by God. Since we are all equal and all given certain rights by God, then we are ALL important. Every person matters.

And because every person matters, our mission demands that we pay special attention to the three groups of people that make up our society. These three

groups are mentioned over and over in the Scriptures and they are the target of all that we do.

Every person matters: The Body of Christ (Christians)

The first group that matters is the group of people who make up the Body of Christ. They were first called “Christians” in the book of Acts.

“So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” Acts. 11:26 NIV

The name stuck over time and it meant, “like Christ.” These are the people in our midst who not only to believe in Jesus, but also want to live like him. We are to care for this group of people as if they were our very own brothers and sisters. They are to be like family to us. That’s why they are prioritized in the Scriptures. Paul says that very thing to the church in Galatia.

**Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
Galatians 6:10 NIV**

So the first group we must prioritize as a part of our mission is our fellow believers in this church.

The second group of people that matters is the group the bible refers to as “The Lost”.

Every person matters: The Lost (Unbelievers)

In Luke 15, Jesus is speaking to the crowd and the Pharisees and he tells three consecutive parables about something that was lost and then found. The parables are about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son.

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?... Luke 15:4 NIV

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?... Luke 15:8 NIV

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after

that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living... Luke 15:12,13

In his book, “Becoming A Contagious Christian”, Bill Hybels says that there are some common threads that run through these three parables. The first is that in each one, something of great value is missing, something that really mattered: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. But most importantly, Jesus goes on to show to the listening crowd that these simple stories represent all the people that he hangs out with; the wanderers, the lost, the spiritually confused...they all have value to the

Heavenly Father. And since “the lost” are of great value to our Heavenly Father, they should be of great value to us as well.

The third group of people that matters to the church is “The Least”

**Every person matters: The Least
(Poor and Needy)**

In his parable about righteous vs. unrighteous people in this present world, Jesus says,

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the

creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for

one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:34-40

The poor, the hungry, the needy, the defenseless...these are just some of the “Least of These” that we are charged by God to care for.

The bottom line to what I’m saying in this first major point is simply this: We do what we do around here because we are collectively on a mission... a mission to connect with and care for the Body of Christ, the lost and the least because “every person matters”. We have small groups, and mid-sized events and the HOPE fund, because every person in this

Body of Christ matters. We have outreach opportunities like this movie series and the Celebration of Christmas because lost people matter. We have partnered with organizations in the community like Parkville Women's Clinic, Restoration House and Something to Eat because the least, the poor and the needy people matter. Furthermore, this is why this week we are kicking off a new generosity initiative called

“The Guest Experience Project”

because we want our guests to feel more at home in our building when they come into this place in search for God. We do

all these things for one reason: Every person, every group matters to God and so they should matter to us well.

The People on Mission

Not only does this movie illustrates Jesus' mission for the church but it also provides a striking metaphor for the type of people who accomplish the mission. Let's spend a few minutes looking at the type of people who are called to carry out the mission to the church.

One of the most amazing things about the real James B. Donovan is that he made a choice to represent a Soviet spy in U.S. court in the middle of the Cold War, which earned him a great degree

of condemnation that most of us wouldn't have the courage to face. He put his reputation on the line and put his family and himself in danger, all for the sake of the mission. That's truly amazing but what's even more amazing is the fact that Donovan's courage didn't go unnoticed, even by the most unlikely of observers.

**>Video Clip - 07 Abel calls Donovan
“Standing Man” (1.9 mins)**

You see, even Abel, a sworn enemy of the United States, could recognize courage and conviction when he saw it. That's why Abel called Jim Donovan, “Stoikiy muzhik” which means

“standing man”. Abel could see the strength of character in Donovan, regardless of the fact that their countries were on opposite sides of the Cold War.

Rudolph Abel’s comments highlight the fact that there is always a cost when it comes to pursuing a mission. For Jim Donovan, the cost came in the form angry protesters, threats to his family and the incredible danger during his daily trips into East Berlin. He could have easily been captured or killed, but he did it anyway. Why? Because he was “Stoikiy muzhik”. He was a standing man. His was a man of conviction who stood firmly and courageously on the principles he believed in.

There's an interesting passage in book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament that describes a sad time during the history of nation of Israel, when there was all sorts of evil and rebellion against God but no "standing man" could be found. This is what it says,

Again a message came to me from the LORD: "Son of man, give the people of Israel this message: In the day of my indignation, you will be like a polluted land, a land without rain. Your princes plot conspiracies just as lions stalk their prey. They devour innocent people, seizing treasures and extorting wealth. They make

**many widows in the land... Ezekiel
22:23-25**

Ezekiel was describing the horrendous evil that had infiltrated the nation of Israel during one of their lowest times in history. But the saddest part is this portion of the passage is found in verse 30:

**“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one.” Ezekiel
22:30**

There was no righteous person to be found in the land who was willing or able to stem the tide of spiritual and moral decay. No one was willing to stand up and courageously take on the mission of rebuilding the nation.

Friends, it takes courageous people to fulfill the mission of the church. God is looking for “Stoky Muhzik”...”standing men and women”. He’s looking for people who aren’t afraid to stand in the gap for the church. God is looking for those of us who are willing to sacrifice time and money and convenience for the sake of the mission, for the sake of the Body of Christ, for the sake of the lost, for the sake of the least. Are you that man or that woman? Will you be that

woman or that man? Do your priorities in life reflect the fact that you are “Stoikiy muzhik” for the sake of this church? This is the kind of people it takes to fulfill the mission of the church.

The Prime Motivator

So far we looked at how this movie illustrates Jesus’ mission for the church, and the character of the people who accomplish that mission. But I believe there’s one more key principle that this movie brings to light and it could be the most important principle of all. It’s what I’d call the “prime motivator” behind all that we do as a church and as Christians. Before I reveal what this “prime motivator” is, I want to go back

for a minute and look at the progression of the relationship between Abel the spy and Donovan the lawyer. When they first met, their relationship is what you'd expect: cold, matter of fact and business-like. Abel never admits to any wrongdoing and doesn't want to fully cooperate with the United States government.

pic of sitting across the table

But their relationship takes a big step forward a few months later after Donovan convinces the judge to give Abel a 30 year prison sentence instead of the death penalty.

pic of Abel and Donovan in courtroom

As soon as the verdict is announced, Abel turns to Donovan in the courtroom and asks, “No electrocution?” And Donovan smiles back and says, “No, no, no!” That’s a turning point in their relationship because Abel begins to trust that Donovan has his best interest in mind and sees him as a person and not just a spy.

As they spend more time together week after week, a mutual respect for each other begins to develop. During their meetings, they laugh and talk together about their families back home.

pic of Abel and Donovan outside talking

During one of their most meaningful talks together, Abel pays Donovan one of the highest compliments possible when he calls him...

pic of Abel sitting at the table.

“Stoikiy muzhik” or “standing man”. And in the months to follow, Donovan not only risks his life to make an exchange for the two American who are prisoners behind the Iron Curtain, but he also works to see that Abel is safely returned to the Soviet Union.

Friends, let me ask you a question. Is

this simply a relationship between a lawyer and his client? Is that all it is or did it become much more? I will tell you what's gone on. Jim Donovan began to care deeply for a man who was a sworn enemy of the US government. Rudolf Abel became a real person and not just a client to Donovan. In fact, he became a friend. He was someone who had a family back in the Soviet Union who missed him greatly. He was one of the least. He was one of the lost and therefore he mattered. In John 15, Jesus said,

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13 NLT

The prime motivator behind all that we do, the motivation that compels us to fulfill our mission as a church and to reach the least and the lost is simply love. It's our love for Christ that compels us to reach out and love others like the Rudolf Abel's of the world.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV

It's our love and gratitude for Christ that compels us to reach out and love the least and the lost. Everybody matters to God. God has never made a person that HE didn't love. God made some people that I don't love, and God has made a lot of people that I don't even like. But God loves them. The most despicable person you can imagine is still loved by God. And because God cares, we must care.

If one of my kids were in a burning building, I wouldn't care how big the flames were - I'd go in after them. I wouldn't care if I got hurt. I wouldn't care if other people said I was crazy. I'd still go in! I'd grab my child and bring

him out. I may be singed and burned. Then people would say, “You were brave!” No, I wasn’t brave or courageous or crazy. I was motivated by love. And when you are motivated by love, you will not, you cannot leave anyone behind because every person matters.

>Video clip - Prisoner exchange on the bridge (4.3 mins)

That’s what it means to love. We lay down our lives for one another, for the least and for the lost. It's the only true motivator in the Christian life. Therefore, “Let us love not only in word and speech but in deed and in truth.” Let's pray.

“Follow you” - Leeland (Richard)

Closing Comments