

The One

Luke 7:18-28

Dec. 16, 2018

And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one...'"

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Whether portrayed as good or evil, Hollywood, it would seem, is intrigued by the concept of a deliverer. In 2001 Hollywood produced a film called "The One". It tells the story of a superhuman criminal named Gabriel, who was once an officer of the "Multiverse Authority" (MVA), an agency that polices interdimensional travel. This is accomplished by detecting wormhole openings, which can be predicted like the weather. Gabriel seeks to hunt down and destroy all other variations of himself in alternate universes. By killing all of his other selves, (and thus becoming the last version of himself) and absorbing their life energies into himself, he believes he will become "The One", a godlike being.

As original as the plot may sound, the 2001 filmmakers more than likely absorbed their creative energies from the writers of a 1999 film called "The Matrix." In that film, actor Keanu Reeves plays Neo, whose name is a clever jumbling of the letters in the word "one." Neo, of course, is the ONE. His arrival long anticipated, he finally comes to set an enslaved people free from a computer generated virtual reality.

As bizarre as these Hollywood plots sound, they are, nonetheless, very popular. Two additional Matrix movies were completed. There are even Matrix video games for Xbox and PlayStation 2.

One might wonder why we are so captivated by the idea of a deliverer. I suspect it has to do with the fact that we long to find someone who is different from us, someone who is more pure and more powerful than us. We long for this person to set us free from our limitations and the futility of our struggle against life's meaninglessness and its finality. Solomon, who could not have even dreamed of a scenario like the one portrayed in the Matrix, nonetheless summed up our struggle for meaning and purpose pretty well. He wrote: "I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving

after wind."

John the Baptist sat suffering and alone in the recesses of a dark, damp dungeon somewhere in Jerusalem. King Herod put him in prison because he had the audacity to call Herod to task for breaking the 6th commandment by marrying his brother's wife.

In what must have seemed like a meaningless end to a principled and devout life, John began to wonder about Jesus, whether or not He was The One. He sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him. "Are you the One or should we wait for another?" John, mind you, wasn't looking for Jesus to break him out of prison. He knew that his fate was already sealed. Even if Jesus was The One, John would still meet the executioner's blade.

John wasn't looking for that kind of deliverer. He simply needed to know if Jesus was the One Israel had long expected would come. Was He "the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world?" If Jesus were the One, John would have the final victory even in death and all of his life's work would have meant something. He could surrender his life to the executioner's blade knowing that he would awaken from the slumber of death to behold the light of God's face.

Beyond Hollywood fantasy and the dark recesses of a Jerusalem dungeon, you and I have all sorts of things from which we long to be delivered. Some of us cry out nearly daily for God to show us purpose and meaning in seemingly pointless routine. Some of us long to be free from a spirit that sometimes drives us down into deep and dark despair. We hide our sorrow especially at this season of the year when everyone expects us to be jovial and light hearted. Some of us just want to conquer the sins that so quickly and easily beset us. We've confessed that sin to God so many times we wonder how He can bear to hear our troubled confession one more time. And finally, some of us wrestle with that troublesome thorn that protrudes from our flesh. We've asked God to take it away but He tells us that in that thorn we'll find His strength for our lives, so we should endure that continual stabbing pain. All of these maladies enslave us in one way or another. With all our assorted captivities we join with St. Paul, crying out, "who will set me free from this body of death!?"

And our answer, your answer, is the same as the answer Jesus gave John. "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Knowing Scripture and the prophecies about the coming Messiah, the deliverer, you then shout for joy at Jesus' coming, for, He is The One. He is your deliverer, your life, your light, your Lord! "Unto **you** is born, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, The Lord!"

In a way that Hollywood could never dream, or, fathom, God broke through space and time to assume your nature and to deliver you from sin and death and from a hopeless existence! A new hymn in our hymnal says it this way: "The Infant Priest was holy born for us unholy and forlorn. From fleshly temple forth came He, anointed from eternity."

By God's grace, resting in the assurance that your Deliverer has come, you now know that there is purpose and meaning in everything in your life. If you are still looking for purpose and meaning in your daily routine, the quest itself is good, for your deliverer has come. If you are still striving to cast off the shackles of depression, know, even in your darkest moment, that your deliverer has come and that He is working in you in ways that you can hardly fathom. If you find yourself confessing again that sin that you so long to conquer, know that your deliverer hears your confession as if your sin had never been confessed before. Such is the forgiving mind of a gracious God. Finally, if you are so tired of picking at that thorn that protrudes from your flesh, let it alone. Your deliverer has put it there for your eternal well being.

The signs are all there! Jesus is The One! And in the mystery of God's love and grace, you are the one He has chosen to bear His name and to live in His Kingdom. Marked with the sign of the cross and cleansed in the water of your baptism, your life is filled with purpose and meaning, "for unto you is born, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, The Lord!" In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.