July 17, 2016

1 Peter 1:3-9

*At the Movies:* Gravity

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

1 Peter 1:3-9 The Inclusive Bible

Praised be the Abba God of our Savior Lord Jesus Christ, who with great mercy gave us new birth: a birth into hope, which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; a birth to an imperishable inheritance incapable of fading or defilement, which is kept in heaven for you who are guarded with God’s power through faith; a birth to a salvation which stands ready to be revealed in the last days. There is cause for rejoicing here. You may, for a time, have to suffer the distress of many trials. But this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead

to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears. Although you have never seen Christ, you love Christ; and without seeing, you still believe, and you rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory, because you are achieving faith’s goal—your salvation.

Our clip today is from the movie *Gravity*, a film with George Clooney and Sandra Bullock, about two scientists whose mission in space was fatally interrupted when satellite debris hit their shuttle. The lives of several astronauts were lost in this unforeseeable accident.

We will see a conversation between George Clooney and Sandra Bullock as he tries to encourage her to not give up.

MOVIE CLIP 1:04:00 – 1:06:11

Do you wanna go back or do you wanna stay here?

We like to be grounded. We like to know that life will be somewhat familiar day after day. You wake up, have breakfast, go about your day, have dinner, relax, and go to bed. And the next day, we hope that life will be very similar to that.

But, we have been reminded in the last few weeks here in Dallas that life is a gift and that nothing is certain. As we were still mourning from the deaths of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, we had our own tragedy with the senseless murders of Brent Thompson, Patrick Zamarripa, Michael Krol, Michael Smith, and Lorne Ahrens. This week there was a horrific attack in Nice, France with 84 people killed and over 1,000 people injured. A military coup in Turkey with 265 dead.

The movie for today begins with the words, “Life in space is impossible.” Sometimes it feels like life on earth is impossible. We like to be grounded. We like to have control. Gravity keeps us grounded. Gravity keeps us controlled and securely fastened to the earth. And we like gravity. It is when that security is stripped away that we're forced to get in touch with the strength, resolve and hope necessary to move our lives forward in powerful ways.[[1]](#footnote-2)

This movie is about adversity and the possibility of new birth that is possible for us on the other side. New birth, new life, and new beginnings in the wake of suffering, tragedy and adversity. Resurrection that happened on Easter Sunday opens the way to new birth and new birth opens the door to let us know that death does not have the final word in this life or the next. All of our endings declare the possibility for something new and unexpected to happen.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Sandra Bullock’s character is struggling to deal with the tragic loss of her 4 year old daughter. She has thrown herself into her work, into this world of isolation. She says, “I was driving and ever since that is what I do. I wake up, I go to work and I drive.” When loss comes, when tragedy comes, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship, when the unexpected happens, how do we respond?

We have these expectations of how life will be. A few weeks ago I received a questionnaire to fill out in preparation for my 20th reunion at Trinity University in San Antonio. I seriously am not sure how that happened so fast. Some of my favorite questions on that questionnaire were, “My immediate family consists of: name or species”. Another question was “When I was at Trinity, where I saw myself in 20 years and how close that vision is to reality?” 20 years ago I was 21, I had no idea that I would be here right now. I had no idea that the adventure of life would take me on so many highs and so many lows, but I am thankful for each one.

We have this idea that life will be a certain way. We have a loss of that ideal when what we are experiencing is not what we were expecting. Maybe our relationship status is not what we expected it to be. Or our job is not what we expected it to be. It is often in retrospect that we realize this, but new birth happens out of suffering, adversity and loss.

 Yesterday I was privileged to celebrate the life of Jeff Holland’s mom at her memorial service. Jeff and his wife Melissa have three kids: Alex, Mikey and Harrison. They have been coming to Greenland Hills for about a year. They apologized to me yesterday for not being at Greenland Hills more regularly, but their youngest is 1! I told Melissa I was just impressed everyone was fed and dressed.

I was at the graveside visiting with the family and I saw two people come towards us. They were visiting graves of family members whose grave stone was right next to where we were standing. I noticed that the grave stone had a Methodist cross and flame, and they were standing about 1 foot away from me so I said, “I’m a Methodist pastor. I noticed that there is a Methodist cross and flame on this grave stone.” I proceeded to get to know Milton and his mom. They were visiting the grave of Milton’s dad and his sister. Milton lives in Colorado and his mom lives in Dallas and worships at St. Luke Community UMC down the road. St. Luke Community is an African American congregation. I started talking about their church and how much I like their pastor and after we had been talking for a few minutes, Milton asked me what I thought about everything that was going on in our world. We started talking about racism and we both acknowledged that we would not have been having this conversation about black lives matter and the horrible deaths in Dallas if the events of the last few weeks had not happened. I probably would not have even said hello, but after the last few weeks, when I saw two people with different skin than my own, I wanted to say hello to them. And I am so glad that I did. Milton and I exchanged business cards and I sent him an email last night. I look forward to getting to know my new friend even more. New birth.

Our scripture today was attributed to the Apostle Peter to give it more authority which was a common practice at the time. 1 Peter 1:3-9 from The Inclusive Bible. “Praised be the Abba God of our Savior Lord Jesus Christ, who with great mercy gave us new birth: a birth into hope, which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; a birth to an imperishable inheritance incapable of fading or defilement, which is kept in heaven for you who are guarded with God’s power through faith; a birth to a salvation which stands ready to be revealed in the last days. There is cause for rejoicing here. You may, for a time, have to suffer the distress of many trials. But this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears. Although you have never seen Christ, you love Christ; and without seeing, you still believe, and you rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory, because you are achieving faith’s goal—your salvation.”

 “You may, for a time, have to suffer the distress of many trials.” Distress means grief, severe emotional mental stress, trauma. And a trial is something that happens that reveals the character or nature of something. These are the things that rattle us and shake us to the core. They are the things that tear open our heart and make us vulnerable. And when we are vulnerable, new birth begins.[[3]](#footnote-4)

 In our movie the tragedies that happen are a result of debris. Why did a missile shoot down a satellite? What is going on? There is no explanation. It is just like the debris or the suffering in our lives. There is no explanation. Sometimes it is a result of decisions that we made, sometimes it just happens. But we know it is not the will of God. And we know we can orient ourselves around grace and love and compassion.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We live in a world that gravitates toward hate, fear, and greed. In the movie, George Clooney tells Sandra Bullock, “You’re going to have to let me go.” We have a hard time letting go. Ever since Sandra Bullock’s character’s daughter died, she has put her life on hold and is having a hard time embracing her new life.

Do you remember on Easter morning when Mary is at the tomb hugging Jesus? Mary might have thought that everything can go back to the way that it was before, but Jesus didn’t return so that everything can go back to the way it was before. Jesus was resurrected on Easter morning so that life can be different.[[5]](#footnote-6)

New birth means embracing life as it is now. Resurrection gives us a new birth to a living hope. Resurrection can influence and shape how we see the world right now. It can be a defining story in our lives. We might say to ourselves, things never work out for me. I am divorced, or a widow or I was abandoned, neglected, abused. I failed, I messed up in the past. New birth offers us a new defining story. Living hope because with Christ all things are possible. And in Jesus we are a new creation.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Jesus asks us to trust in a new story and the life that comes with it, because that is who we really are. We are about transformation, freedom, living hope, because death does not have the last word in this life or the next. Our scripture ended with these words, “Although you have never seen Christ, you love Christ; and without seeing, you still believe, and you rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory, because you are achieving faith’s goal—your salvation.”

May it be so today, Amen.

1. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Much of this paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/1804 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)