

Movie Message: Glory Road
Galatians 3: 23-29
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St. John United Methodist Church
Anchorage, Alaska
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Today is the first in our movie message series. On my summer Sundays to preach we will deal with themes in both a movie and scripture. I have used the list of movies many of you submitted a few months ago. I also sent you a survey link last Thursday requesting your choices of themes.

Our first movie is a sports movie based on a true story called Glory Road. In 1965, Don Haskins' claim to fame was that he coached a national championship basketball team of high school girls. So when Texas Western a Division 1 college invites him to apply for a job as men's basketball coach, he jumps at the chance. What Haskins does not know is that Texas Western is really looking for a nanny for their men's athletic dorm. What Texas Western does not know about Haskins is his absolute commitment to discipline, excellence, and doing what it takes to win. With nearly a non-existent recruiting budget, Haskins goes outside the box and does something unheard of in his day: he recruits seven black players for his twelve member team. Defying racist attitudes and an initially unsupportive administration, Haskins powers his team to the NCAA Championship game, and a chance to change the way people think about a lot more than just basketball.

Let's set one of the early scenes. It's 1965 and Coach Don Haskins is on a recruiting trip, trying to find players for his low-ranked Texas Western team. He is rejected by every decent high school player in his region, and then he finally decides to recruit in a more unconventional way.

Haskins and his assistants, Ross and Moe, are scouting a player at a summer college league. Don is looking at a young man with his head hung down low at the end of the bench. The floor coach taps him and he enters near the end of the game. In no time, the young man establishes dominance on the court. Why isn't he being played? Because he is black.

Haskins wants to talk with the boy but is told by his coach that black players can't lead and can't handle the pressure. But Haskins is undeterred and just wants to know where Hill can be found.

Haskins finds Hill in the locker room clearing out his locker. Haskins introduces himself and says that he would like to talk to Hill about playing for him at Texas Western, but Hill is not interested, "I'm done playing this game. They hardly put me on the floor tonight."

Haskins says that he is "offering a full scholarship," but Hill thinks that Haskins just wants to use him, "sign me up as your token Negro and then bury me at the end of the bench? I'd rather hang it up, do something else. Be the next Smokey Robinson. I might even run for president." Despite all the bravado, you can see that Hill is beaten down.

Haskins praises the young man's talent and urges him not to throw it away. Hill explains that all he has ever wanted to do was play basketball, "Do you understand

what that's like? To have that ball in your hand? It's like making sweet music with your game. Only thing is, you don't want to hear the song!" Hill picks up his bag, leaves the locker room, and begins to walk across the court, but Haskins isn't done with him yet.

Haskins confronts him, "You talk a good game, Hill. I didn't come here to find a player I could sit on the bench. I intend to start you -- start NCAA Division One ball.

Hill spins around and wants to know, "What is it with you, mister? I've accepted it. What are you smokin'?"

Hill thinks that Haskins is bluffing but he's not. Haskins challenges him, "Now you've just told me about a big old dream you have. I can let you play. I can help you make your dream come true faster than a twister'll take your socks off."

Hill says, "You talk funny."

Haskins stares him down, "So do you."

Hill asks, "You gonna let a black player play from the get-go?" And Haskins realizes that Hill doesn't get it. Haskins explains, "I don't see color. I see quick, I see skill and that's what you have and that's what I'm putting on the court."

Finally intrigued, Hill asks, "Okay, so what is this team, anyway?"

(Show video.)

Coach Haskins initially tried to build his team the old-fashioned way, but he quickly realized that this method wasn't going to work for him. Instead he became determined to go after the very athletes that none of the other schools wanted -- the black players. By looking at giftedness rather than skin color he was able to accomplish the unimaginable: create and field a national championship team in his first year as a coach of a previously unranked Division One school.

Let's take a moment to think about the Church, even our church, as a giant basketball team. We all bring our gifts to work together for a common goal -- to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But what kinds of "recruiting methods" are we using? Are we only interested in bringing people in who already look and act like "us"? Or are we willing to follow God's example and recruit "outside the box?"

In the movie Coach Haskins and his staff had to go beyond the city limits of El Paso to New York and Gary, Indiana to find players for his team. How many churches expect their new players to come to them? Do all people always feel comfortable walking through the doors of St. John? Of course not. It doesn't matter how welcoming we may be. There will always be the need for the church to take the welcoming, accepting, loving grace of God to where people are. I believe the time has come for our church to consider starting something new in a different part of Anchorage. I am asking our Church Council to form a task force to look into this issue.

Scripture tells us that God repeatedly reaches out to the outcasts and those pushed to the margins of society. Galatians talks about differences such as being male or female won't matter in the kingdom of God! Thank the Lord that God does not look at us through human eyes! Have you ever thought about what God does NOT care about? God does not care about our skin color or whether our facial or body features are pleasing to the human eye. God does not care about how much money we make or how nice a home we have. God does not care if you're male or

female, straight or gay. God does not look on the exterior, but on the heart. We exist as the Church to learn how to look at the world through the eyes of God. The temptation is to look with the world's eyes, to see differences, to place value on those differences. Our church is here to transform it by seeing it with God eyes...to touch it with God hands...to love it with a God heart.

This is why we gather for worship and education each week, so we can be reminded of our purpose and strengthened for the challenge. It's so easy to get sucked into the world's way of seeing and thinking. Seeing the world through God's eyes is tough. In the movie the team is on a bus after a very unwelcoming experience at one of their away games. Let's listen to two players talking from their hearts on that bus.

Video clip

Do you ever feel the shame of racism? The truth is that we all are racist to some degree. Racism is not only about looking down on a group of people because of their race. It is also about looking up. It is about treating some people better than others simply because of their race. Are you a positive racist or a negative racist?

For many of us racism is not about overt actions we see in this movie. Racism is more subtle. Racism has shifted to the unconscious ways we think. Whether it is violent or subtle its effects are damaging to God's people. I invite us all to think about the subtle ways we look at people with the world's eyes. Let us confess our sin and shame before God with the hope that we will see the day when all of God's children will be treated equally, fairly, and with justice.

In the movie as in real life Texas Western made it to the NCAA championship game in 1966. I could not end without showing you that incredible moment when they beat powerhouse Kentucky.

Video clip

In Christ Jesus there is no black or white. What a wonderful image of how God's world will be! A world where those once pushed to the edges of society will stand up and say, "I'm a world champion!" This is the kind of world God is trying to achieve. This is the kind of world you and I as the Church of Jesus Christ are to be about! Thanks be to God!