

“One Of A Kind”  
Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
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Third in the sermon series “The Gospel in Great Movies”  
“Everyone Matters” as seen in “It’s a Wonderful Life”

Psalm 139: 1-18

Matthew 5:1-16

Hold onto your hats, for I’m about to dazzle you with statistics! Do you know, that as of Friday, May 15, 2009, there were 6 billion, 7 hundred and 80 million, 65 thousand, 6 hundred and 57 people in the world? Did you know that?

Or did you know, that as of Friday, May 15, 2009, there were 306 million, 435 thousand, 962 Americans?

Or - did you know that as of 2008 (sorry, I couldn’t get more current statistics), there were 5 million, 633 thousand, 597 Marylanders - and 99 thousand, 926 people living in Cecil County?

And did you know that as of 2007 (sorry, but that’s the only thing that came up on my computer for Elkton), there were 14,825 residents of the town of Elkton?

And did you know that as of the end of 2008 (when we prepared our reports for the Annual Conference) there were 1,005 members of this church?

And you know what’s most amazing of all - is that you are one of those people in almost every single one of those statistics (I say almost, because many of you don’t live in the town of Elkton.) And what’s even more amazing than the fact that you are one of those billions of people - is the fact that there is no one else like you - you are uniquely you - you are one of a kind. There is nobody on this planet exactly like you. God created you, out of 7 billion people, one of a kind.

You know what? It’s easy to forget that, isn’t it? It’s easy to forget about special we are, how unique and special each one of us is because God created us that way. It’s easy to forget that every single one of us brings something different to this world, something that would be missing if we weren’t here.

The main character of today’s movie could tell us about that, couldn’t he? If you haven’t been here for a few weeks, you might be confused at this point, so let me remind everyone that during the month of May, I’m doing a sermon series

entitled “The Gospel in Great Movies.” The first Sunday of May we looked together at the Kingdom of Heaven as shown so beautifully in “Places in the Heart.” Last week, we discovered unbelievable parental love in “Life is Beautiful.” Today’s movie is a true classic, a movie that some people watch every single year as almost a family tradition. It was made way back in 1946 by director Frank Capra, and stars Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey and Donna Reed as his wife Mary.

I watched the whole thing again the other day, which is no small thing - it two hours and ten minutes long. But what a movie it is - and what a beautiful portrayal of the uniqueness and importance of every single human being God creates.

Let me take you through the movie. George Bailey is a good man, who, at the beginning of the movie, is going through a bad time. So bad, that he’s totally despondent, and pondering ending it all.

Enter God - who sends an angel to care for good old George. A delightful, wonderful angel by the name of Clarence. Before Clarence can take on this special project, God gives him a snapshot of George’s life so he knows what he’ll be dealing with.

George is a good guy. He’s one of two sons born to loving parents. The dad runs the local building and loan company, the mother runs a loving home, the younger brother is carefree and charismatic. As the story begins, George is all excited as he prepares to tour the world after he finishes school, and before he has to settle down. He’s footloose and fancy-free and ready to see the sights of Europe, and then, suddenly, his father passes away.

George’s world is turned upside down, and I think, it seems to him, that it never turns right side up. George stays in town, takes over the building and loan company, cares for his mother, and his younger brother gets to go on the world adventure, eventually becoming a decorated war hero.

George stays home, and is the dutiful son. He runs the bank, marries his sweetheart Mary, moves into an old beautiful, but broken down Victorian house with her, and together they have a family of four children.

As life is wont to do, his life got overwhelming. The bills kept pouring in, the house needed repairs, the kids got sick occasionally, and worst of all, evil kept rearing its ugly head in the form of one Mr. Potter, the wealthiest man in town who wanted everything for himself - and got it, except for Bailey’s Building and Loan.

He put incredible pressure on George and his uncle to get their company and

complete his takeover of the town. In a tragic twist of fate, a great deal of money belonging to the building and loan is lost (and of course Potter is involved in that), and because they don't have the money, the whole thing is threatening to collapse.

Understandably, George is absolutely beside himself. It's the last straw. He's absolute desperate to save the bank, and his family. He tries everything and nothing works. That's when he decides to end it all. He can't take anymore, so he goes to a bridge and prepares to jump.

And that's exactly when God sends dear old Clarence onto the scene. George is so focused on all the negatives in his life, that he can't see anything positive, especially about himself. So Clarence sets out to help him.

And help him he does. He shows him how much he matters and has mattered his whole life. He shows him how unique he is, and how all the things he has done throughout his life have made a difference to so many people. He walks him through his life - only he does it by showing him how different life would have been for so many people if he had never lived. It was a shocking experience for George.

You know, when I was watching this movie the other day, I was struck by how timeless it is. That movie could have been made today - for so many people are going through exactly what George Bailey was going through. Times are tough for a lot of people, jobs are being lost, houses need repair, kids get sick, people try to take things away from them. A lot of people today are probably struggling to remember how much they matter, because life is overwhelming them. A lot of people have forgotten how special they are, because the world is kicking them down.

In the movie, God sent an angel named Clarence to pick up George Bailey. But in life, friends, the Good News of the Gospel is that God sent Jesus Christ for you and for me. God sent Jesus to remind us of who we are and whose we are.

To remind us that we are each beloved, blessed, and unique children of God. We are each one of a kind, created by God to be exactly who we are.

And God sent Jesus to remind us that each one of us matters - we matter - each of us is of sacred worth - each of us is important in the eyes of God - and the world would not be the same without us.

And God sent Jesus to remind us that every single day what we do makes a difference. Remember the words of the Gospel lesson where Jesus said, "Let your light so shine . . ." Our individual lights shining make a difference in ways we will never know.

We don't have to do monumental, earth-shattering things to make a difference - we just have to be the persons God created us to be - sharing our unique gifts and talents - and God will use what we offer to touch other lives.

The scriptures are full of examples of people who did just that. Remember the little boy who brought his lunch to that gathering on the hillside where Jesus was speaking? Jesus took what little he had, and fed five thousand with it.

And remember Mary and Martha who had Jesus over for lunch. God took the gifts of hospitality they offered and so many were touched and fed.

And what about the innkeeper who offered a stable for Jesus' birth, or the man who offered his donkey for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? None of these people did anything extraordinary, they simply offered who they were and what they had and it meant so much to so many.

You are special. Everyone of us is special and unique and one of a kind. Never forget that. God has created you to be uniquely you - gifted in just the right way to do just the right things that God needs you to do. Never forget that. Never underestimate who you are and whose you are. Don't let the stuff of life get you down, and cause you to forget that you are a precious and beloved child of God.

At the end of this delightful movie, George Bailey remembers that - in a big way! He has seen, through his experience with Clarence, how much he has mattered and still matters, and because he does, he runs back into his life as fast as his legs can carry him.

That's where we'll join him now . . .

Film clip - Scenes 27 & 28

Imagine, friends. If that's the joy of a man in a movie who suddenly discovers how much he matters . . . how much more is the joy of one who comes to know Christ, and in so doing, comes to know himself or herself to be a beloved, precious, unique child of God?

May it be so for you today. May you remember and rejoice, for God has made you one of a kind. You are the only you there will ever be. You are a beloved, blessed and gifted child of God who touches the world in special ways every ordinary day of your life. Thanks be to God.

Amen.