

Woodlawn Chapel Presbyterian Church

A Films & Faith Sermon by

The Rev. Dr. Christopher W. Keating

#4 “A Wrinkle in Time”

Sunday, September 2, 2018

John 14:1-7

The summer after my freshmen year in college I was a volunteer at a small congregation in rural Washington state. Unlike the children in *A Wrinkle in Time*, I did not travel through a wrinkle in time to get to this new place, though it might as well have been on the other side of the universe. While my friends in California were spending the summer at the beach or in the mountains, I was plopped down in the center of Washington’s apple country in a town that bore a striking resemblance to the old television show “Green Acres.”

Not exactly, but close.

There was one stop light, only one restaurant and a ministerial association run by an independent fundamentalist preacher who believed Presbyterians were the off-spring of Satan. I imagined I had been called to ministry: but I did not imagine I had been called to this place.

The biggest discovery for me was how dark it got at night. Lacking all the lights of the Los Angeles basin, this town disappeared when the sun went down. As part of my experience, I stayed with a different family every two weeks. At one farm, I showed up on a Saturday morning as had been arranged and found a note that said: “Gone camping. The door’s unlocked. Make yourself at home.”

When the sun went down, and I was all by myself, I realized why farmers go to bed so early: everything is enfolded by darkness. Out on that farm by myself, I decided to read the book I had brought along for the summer – Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. That was a bad decision.

In the dark, farms make a lot of noise. The house itself groaned and creaked all night, and then, at odd and unexpected intervals the pump connected to the water well began to run, shaking the house and awakening me from my fitful

sleep. Just before sunrise, the animals began their morning conversations. The final coup de grace came at 6 a.m. when hired man made an appearance outside my open window.

In the dark, our imaginations run wild.

We ask those whom we have called to be ministers, elders and deacons a lot of questions, including my favorite, “Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?” Will you allow what Paul called “the foolishness” of the gospel to fuel your hope? Will you dare to imagine the impossible, and to love even those who refuse to dream, to pray, to hope, to imagine?

Leadership in ministry demands imagination, writes Ken McFayden, yet unfortunately, far too many churches, like many of us become casualties of our imagination.¹ We look out at the dark, and we’re uncertain that there is a way. We see only obstacles, not possibilities. Our mouths get dry, we get scared, and allow the darkness to overrun us.

Put another way, it is awfully hard imagining how much light a new light bulb can bring when you’ve been swallowed up by the darkness. Finding a way out of darkness is not easy. It can become a daunting struggle.

It is hard to imagine possibilities when the darkness falls. We hear John’s promise, “the darkness did not overcome it,” but sometimes we wonder. We hear Jesus say, “I am the truth, the way, the life,” but like Thomas, we’re quick to respond, “Lord, we do not know the way.”

The darkness chills us. We remember him telling us, “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I could to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself,” but still...we imagine the worst.

A Wrinkle in Time is a story that challenges us to imagine the best. Madeline L’Engle’s book was first published in 1962, and it was an immediate hit. Her manuscript had been turned down by countless publishers, but it eventually won the Newbery Medal for outstanding children’s literature. It has become a

¹ See Kenneth McFayden, “Leading With Energy, Intelligence, Imagination and Love,” *Leading Ideas*, The Lewis Center for Church Leadership, 1/20/2010, <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/leading-with-energy-intelligence-imagination-and-love/>

beloved story of the power of love overcoming darkness, all formed around Madeline L'Engle's Christian faith. It is a story that blends faith and science, a reminder of the power of imagination.

It is the story of a girl named Meg Murry, her young brother Charles Wallace and their friend Calvin. The three come together to search for Meg and Charles Wallace's dad. Dr. Murry is a well known scientist who has been missing for four years. Charles Wallace stumbles upon a trio of mysterious parts of the universe – Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which. Mrs. Which is played by Oprah, who is clearly the leader of the universe – would you have expected anything else?

There are differences between the movie and the book, of course, but what connects them is the search for Meg and Charles Wallace's Dad. The three children learn that Dr. Murry had "tessered" through the universe, or "wrinkling" through time to travel billions of light years in a short time. He has landed on a planet ruled by a mysterious dark monster called "IT." "IT" is evil, a dark power that threatens the universe. To stop "IT" from advancing, they children must come together as warriors to rescue Dr. Murry.

Director Ava Devarney has made her own imprint on this story, but at its core, it still invites us to us to imagine and rethink the power of Christian community.

"It is through the world of the imagination," Madeline L'Engle once wrote, "which takes us beyond the restrictions of provable fact, that we touch the hem of truth."

But encounters with darkness are never easy, as the children of *A Wrinkle in Time* would tell us. They learn that darkness threatens everyone. Overcoming it means discovering the grace of depending on each other. They learn what it means to trust.

I've been thinking about how we can be at our best when life brings us the worst. As I listen to Jesus' words, I am challenged to recall that we do not enter the darkness alone. Likewise, from the very beginning of John's gospel, we are assured that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome

it. Like Meg and Calvin, and Charles Wallace, we need to learn that by holding to each other, we confront the darkness.

At one point, when the children are unsure of whether they can move forward with their mission, one of the trio of women – Mrs. Who, who only speaks in quotations, reminds them of a quote by the great Persian mystic Rumi. “the wound is the place,” she tells them “where the light enters you.”

Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, enters through the wounded places of our lives and brings us hope. We need to hold on, we need each other, and we need the faithful imagination to believe our wounds will bring us healing.

George Herbert was a 16th century poet and minister. His words have reflected the rays of Christ’s light for centuries, and they touch us still:

*Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.*

*Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.*

*Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.*

Amen.