

## Dances With Wolves

*God at the Movies 2021...Pt. 2*

### [Dances with Wolves Trailer 2:15]

It was November 22, 1990, Thanksgiving Day. In my first semester at the University of Texas, I'd come home to be with my family for the holiday. Ours is a family of traditions – we'll do all this again next month. After the big lunch, we settled into my aunt and uncle's family room to watch the Cowboy game. We were up against the hated rivals, those Washington Redskins – a name I would not realize was offensive for another 7 years. Emmitt Smith rushed for a 48 yard touchdown in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter to give us the win.

So we would have been a happy family when we all bundled off to the cineplex for our annual Thanksgiving night movie. We've done this as long as I can remember. We've seen some gems and we've seen some stinkers. That night, we chose a film that had come out the day before. A Western that was being billed as a vanity project by heartthrob actor – here turned first-time director - Kevin Costner. The film was called *Dances with Wolves*.

In her review in *The New Yorker* a week or so later, legendary film critic Pauline Kael would describe it as “a kid's daydream of being an Indian.” She didn't mean that as a complement. She writes, “There's nothing affected about Costner's acting or directing. You hear his laid-back, surfer accent; you see his deliberately goofy

faints and falls, and all the close-ups of his handsomeness. This epic was made by a bland megalomaniac. (The Indians should've named him Plays with Camera.) You look at that untroubled face and know he can make everything lightweight...Crowds of moviegoers love the movie, though - maybe partly because the issues have been made so simple.”

But as any Hollywood insider will tell you, crowds trump critics every time. And *Dances with Wolves* was a bonafide hit. The major studios were very weary of the project and refused to fully fund it. After all, Westerns had been dead for decades at this point. So Costner was forced to reach deep into his own pockets to provide most of the \$18 million budget. And it paid off. It became the highest grossing Western of all time with a domestic take of \$184 million and earning Costner personally a reported \$40 million profit – not a bad investment.

And it made a big splash at the 1991 Oscar's – host Billy Crystal rode out on a horse in tribute. The film was nominated for 12 Oscars and won 7 including Cinematography and Film Editing – it *is* a beautiful film – and Music – John Berry's score really stirs the heart, I've been listening to it all week. It was the first Western to win Best Picture since *Cimarron* in 1931! And it garnered the Best Director trophy for Costner I'm sure taking the sting out of his losing out on Best Actor. On the unfortunate side, it apparently gave him the confidence to later direct *The Postman*, considered one of the biggest busts in cinema history.

I'll tell you another audience that the film did well with; Native Americans. Because of the film's enormous success and sympathetic treatment of their people, the Sioux Nation adopted Kevin Costner as an honorary member. Now, the Sioux were not originally the focal tribe of this story. *Dances with Wolves* is actually based on a novel by the same name and it was about the Comanches – who were around this part of the country. But for filming purposes they needed a large herd of buffalo, which were found in South Dakota – and so they changed the Indians to Sioux.

Now, I will admit up front that Pauline Kael's criticism of the simplification of this film is not without merit. It does tend to come across as an "Indian good – white man bad" stereotype. I think Costner does try to temper this in his depiction of the brutality of the Pawnee tribe in the film – but the reality is the Sioux were no angels. There's nothing simple about the Native American story.

First of all, they were hardly a monolithic people. The tribes were very diverse. Maybe it's the historian in me, but whenever I watch a period piece movie, I'm always drawn to read up on the actual history of the time. If you would like to read about the real life complications of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian frontier, I can hardly recommend anything better than *Empire of the Summer Moon* by S.C. Gwynne, the former editor of *Texas Monthly*. No, it's not about the local coffee company, but it is about the rise and fall of the Comanche nation.

And you know who didn't like the Comanches? All the *other* Indian tribes! There's was a warrior culture totally built on strength and violence. Their very name was taken from other tribal dialects and literally means "enemy". Not nice people.

There's a website that let's you track who settled on your land before you did. 8203 West Hwy 71 Austin Texas 78739 – where we are gathered this morning - is listed in the native registry as sitting on Jumanos tribal lands. And let me tell you something, white men didn't take it from them. The Comanches did. And then Texans took it from the Comanches. And now Californians are talking it from them.

It is a complicated story. But there has always been a desire to simplify the narrative, even when it was happening. The further away from the frontier you lived, the more sympathy you tended to have for the Natives over the settlers. Gwynne addresses it, "The notion that the trouble with plains Indians was entirely due to white men was spectacularly wrongheaded. The people who cherished it, many of whom were in the US Congress, the Office of Indian Affairs, and other positions of power, had no historical understanding of the Comanche tribe, no idea that the tribe's very existence was based on war and had been for a long time. No one who knew anything about the century-long horror of Comanche attacks in northern Mexico or about their systematic demolition of the Apaches or the Utes of the Tonkawas could possibly have believed that the tribe was either peaceable or blameless." (Empire, 224)

The hero of our film wants to get away from the too distant bureaucracy and see the real story for himself. We first meet Lt. John Dunbar on a Civil War battlefield in Tennessee in 1863. Wounded and on the verge of having his leg amputated, he decides to commit suicide by heroism – riding his horse alone headlong into enemy lines. But amazingly he not only survives but inspires his men to charge and win the day. So he misses out on the suicide part of the plan, but winds up a decorated hero. And with his new found status, he requests to be sent to the wild frontier. Let's take a look. **[Knights Errand 1:40]**

None of the soldiers come out looking very good in this movie, and this guy is clearly going mad. But crazy recognizes crazy. Everybody thinks Dunbar is a fool for requesting such a post. The truth is, during the Civil War, the troops posted to the western frontier really were the worst of the worst. So when he's sent on a "knight's errand" it's not meant to be a complement. They are mocking his naïveté in choosing to go to such a difficult place. Who would go *there* if you didn't have to?

But I can identify with John Dunbar. I'm not a soldier, but I am a church planter. In fact, in my denomination, we call the week of church planter training "BootCamp".

And when I went to BootCamp in 2002, I knew I was called to plant a church, but I wasn't entirely sure *where*. I'd done a bunch of demographic research and basically boiled it down to two places – a town in the DFW mid-cities called North Richland Hills, and Southwest Austin.

Now, you have no idea how close this church came to not existing. The denominational officials were gently steering me toward North Richland Hills – I mean it made a lot of sense, it was a town of 80,000 people with no church from our tribe, I had graduated from High School there and my dad happened to be the town's mayor at the time. And churches tend to do really well in the Metroplex if you haven't noticed.

Meanwhile, the last five church plants in my denomination in Austin did not exist by the time we got here. They all died. In fact, local Christians of all stripes were constantly telling me the nickname for this particular part of Austin; "the church planters graveyard." I was like Dunbar on his way out West, bleached skeletons riddled with arrows marked the trail! The year before we arrived, the Barna organization named Austin the second most unchurched city in America after San Francisco. But of course, as you've probably deduced, I too chose the wild frontier.

When Lt. Dunbar reaches his destination the post is deserted – in fact there are signs of trouble. His guide wastes no time in hightailing it out, warning him as he goes about the Indians – you don’t want anything to do with those savages, they’re all just beggars and thieves. And when Dunbar does make first contact, there’s plenty of fear and suspicion...on both sides.

But eventually he begins to make a breakthrough. Now, that “eventually” covers about an hour of this three hour movie. Which Costner’s first cut was actually *five and a half hours* and the studio insisted he whittle it down to a “tight” three. This is a long movie folks, so I am jumping around quickly for the sake of the sermon. But as he makes more and more contact, he begins to discover the common humanity of these seemingly exotic people. Let me play you a clip of his narrated journal entries. **[Breakthrough 1:12]**

He’s building bridges, but his identity is still clearly with the army miles away – the fort is still his home – he is a soldier first and foremost. Well, when we first moved to Austin, I don’t mind telling you that I thought of myself as something of a missionary bringing Christian civilization to these savage Austinites. For the eight years before coming here to start the church, Deanna and I had lived in the most un-Austin place imaginable; Springfield, MO, location of the Assemblies of God World Headquarters. If our slogan is “Keep Austin Weird”, Springfield’s is “Keep Your Weird to Yourself”. Springfield, where the most

eclectic food offering is found on Asian night at Applebee’s!

So when we moved to Austin in 2003, our eyes were wide open. We bought a house – back when you *could*, I won’t tell you what we paid for it because you’d be angry with me - and we began to meet our neighbors. Real live pagans! We’d say we’ve come to open a church and they’d say, “You mean the chicken place?” Biblically illiterate, secular, liberal, didn’t even go to church on Easter, Austinites. But a funny thing soon began to happen. Oh, I never lost sight of the goal to spread the gospel, but the more I got to know these exotic folk, I ceased to think of them as my mission field...and I just thought of them as my friends.

Well, back in 1864, John Dunbar is making friends as well. Including a *lady friend*. This *is* Hollywood so of course there’s a romance angle. Like in *The Godfather* two weeks ago, once again a woman serves as our way in to a closed tribe – not the mafia this time, but the equally patriarchal Lakota Sioux of the Dakota plains. Her name is Stands with Fist, but it used to be Christine when she was captured at the age of nine during an Indian raid on her settlement that left the rest of her family murdered and scalped. Since then she’s completely acclimated to her tribal family – with the notable exception of her hair, which for unexplained reasons looks like she stepped out of a Vidal Sassoon Salon at the mall in 1989.

Anywho...she is encouraged to pick up her near-forgotten English tongue to help translate for the visiting soldier. And she helps him with his tongue alright! *Dances with Foxes!* Her storyline – including fist-fighting the older women of the tribe for acceptance, is actually based on the true story of Cynthia Ann Parker who was captured by the Comanche in 1836 when she was 9. You can still visit the site at Ft. Parker just 45 minutes east of Waco.

Unlike *Stands with a Fist*, Ms. Parker married a Comanche chief named Peta Nocona and was “rescued” by Texas Rangers when she was 33 – only she didn’t want to be rescued. She had so acclimated to Indian life that her “rescue” broke her. They basically kidnapped her from her family all over again. In fact she tried to escape numerous times before finally committing suicide by voluntary starvation just a decade later. She was a huge celebrity in the late 1800’s. Lived in Austin for a time. Every Texas needs to know the sad story of Cynthia Ann Parker. Her son Quanah Parker would become the last war chief of the Comanche surrendering to the army in 1875.

But that’s real life, we’re talking about the movies. So *Stands with a Fist* is totally acclimated to the Lakota tribe. Well, Lt. John Dunbar is also adapting to the

Indian way of life. As his visits increase, his “home” at the fort becomes more and more lonely. Take a look at this scene as he again addresses “Dear diary”, **[Going Native :58]**

You might call this “going native”. There’s an interesting transition taking place with Dunbar’s character and you can demonstrate it just by his uniform. Costume Design is one of the few Oscars that *Dances with Wolves* didn’t win, but they really used this to affect. Before he rides out to visit the tribe for the first time, he is seen polishing his boots and shining his buttons, he is every inch the picture of a United States Cavalry officer. The next time he visits – to meet the woman and begin communication – his collar is open and he wears a beaded necklace, likely garnered in trade. When he arrives to help the tribe fend off an attack by the enemy Pawnee, his wardrobe is half and half.

By this time he has acquired his own tipi with the Sioux and has pretty much abandoned the fort. As he says, “I finally know who I am now. The Army holds nothing for me.” They’ve even given him a tribal name, *Dances with Wolves* – they had seen him playing around with the stray wolf known as “Two-Socks”, who he’s basically made into a pet.

When John eventually takes Stands with Fist as his wife, he's dressed completely in buckskin with feathers in his hair. He looks like the lead singer of Poison. He has come to embrace this new community, realizing many of their "strange" customs are actually better than his own. He even speaks the Lakota language. They've "civilized" *him* it seems.

You know, there's something to be said for learning from pagans. That would have been unthinkable to me back in the Springfield days. Deanna and I both grew up in a "come out from among them and be ye separate" branch of Christianity. The "spiritual" thing to do was to avoid pretty much everything the world did. Especially if it looked like fun! So Deanna didn't see a movie in a theatre until after we were married. I still oversee pastors who will not go into a movie theatre lest...I don't know, God will smite them or something?

Deanna also wasn't allowed to play with cards or anything that had to do with gambling. If they got a board game, her mother would take away the dice and make she and her sisters a spinner – because she had never heard of roulette, I suppose. But a funny thing happened when we got to Austin. You might recall that the poker craze that was all the rage in the early 2000's? Well, some of our new found friends had an idea.

They came to us and said, "Hey, we really enjoy having these spiritual conversations when we come over to your house. We've got some friends who would probably be interested in that as well, what if we started a traveling poker night and used it to have some of these conversations around the table?" No money changed hands, but there would be snacks and a rotating trophy for the winner. So we did.

And as it turned out...Deanna is really good at poker! I mean she's an accountant, she see's the world through math. Now, she didn't know a club from a spade, but she would wind up winning as often as the guys who went to tournaments at the casinos. They started calling her "Rain Man." And we built more pagan friendships.

Now, I was asked to speak at our big Denominational District Council around that time and I wanted to tell that story. But I was warned that it might be too shocking for some of the more traditional people in the room. That I might lose the audience before they got a chance to really hear me. Can you imagine? But they would be worried that we'd become tainted by the pagans.

Now, I hope you don't think I'm being pejorative in my use of the term "pagan" – even if others mean it to be, I don't. It's just one other state of being a non-Christian spiritual person. Just like the variety of non-Christian religions all over the world. They all have something to teach us. I didn't used to think that, but I do now. After all, all truth is God's truth.

Over the COVID downtime, one of the things that I took an interest in was Russian Orthodox Theology – anyone else? Now, that *is* Christian – older Christian than anything we'd dream of in the Western world. But I was reading a priest named Sergius Bulgakov who is considered the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's leading orthodox theologian. And he talks a lot about the benefits of "positive paganism". Now, he's not saying that's the end game, they need to come to believe in Jesus like everyone does. But he believes pagans get a bad rap that other world religions avoid.

After the fall of Eden, the human God-interest didn't just disappear. Listen, "Banished from paradise, the human seeks God, for he is 'not far from each of us.' Such searching is paganism, which contains or at least can contain positive knowledge of God, something revealed about him. The thirst for an encounter with God in paganism burns even more strongly than in revealed religion; the search is more ardent, more agonizing...Not for nothing was it revealed in the

fullness of time that pagans proved to be more ready to receive Christ than Jews, for they thirsted and waited for him more intensely: the prodigal son had been home sick and languishing for a long time already." (Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 328-329)

There are *some* areas where dedicated pagans get closer to God's truth than nominal Christians. Stewardship of nature is one example. This is depicted in the film, the Indian use of the buffalo is more Godly than the white hunters, who leave a trail of waste and squander in their path. The Native People's respected nature. The traders exploited it. It's estimated there were as many as 30 million bison roaming the planes of America. By 1880, there were one hundred! Pillaging nature doesn't honor God.

But still, come on, yes, it's a pain in the keister to build a church in environmentally sensitive Austin – believe me! But I wouldn't trade it for pastoring in DFW where they asphalt over every square inch to add more parking. I've been converted to the environmental spirit of my tribe – I think it's better stewardship of God's creation. We had a group of consultants come down from Dallas to evaluate the church a few years ago. You know what they kept talking about? *Still* talk about? Our recycle bins. "You're the church with recycle bins!" Shocking.

But that's just one value I have adopted from my "pagan mission field". There are lots more. Over 18 years of pastoring in this community, I hope I've brought some change to you...but please know that you have brought change to me too. But I can tell you, a lot of people don't understand that. *Especially* the people that sent you out to convert the pagans in the first place! In fact, if you start looking like the enemy, they're bound to start *treating* you like the enemy.

This is what happens to Lt. Dunbar as he rides back to his abandoned fort to discover...it's no longer abandoned. Reinforcements have arrived. And as he rides up in his native dress, they begin to yell, "Injun!" And in their fear they shoot at him, killing his faithful horse and beating him bloody in the process. Now in chains, the war hero is questioned by a dismissive band of soldiers. **[Clip Traitor 1:27]**

"We don't know whether to salute him or shoot him." Can I be honest with you? Are we all friends? I have often felt this way in my own denomination. Monday I'll be driving up to Dallas to attend two days of Presbyter meetings – oh yes, they eventually made me an officer...but I never feel like I really belong. The meetings start with a banquet Monday night. A couple of years ago, I was arriving as everyone was starting to eat. I said to the guy holding the door for me – a Presbyter from rural East Texas – "I just barely made it, traffic getting out of Austin was terrible."

He growled, "I *hate* Austin!" A minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ! I said, "Well I love Austin." "What's there to love?", he replied. "Well for starters", I said "It's my mission field. It's the place God sent me to seek and save the lost." To which he almost spat, "Can they be saved?" The only good Indian is a dead Indian, right?

About 8 years ago, I was a part of a cohort of pastors in a year long intensive process to work on church health. Again I'd drive up to Dallas once a month for all day meetings – it's always Dallas! Anyway, about 30 of us were having a discussion about "Belong Before You Believe" and I was like, "Hey, we live that! That's one of our values." They were talking theory, but I could tell they really didn't get it where the rubber meets the road. So I told them about a situation we'd just discussed in our staff meeting the week before.

It was Test Drive week where people sign up to serve in various areas of ministry. So we had a couple of guys who signed up to be greeters. They were some of the friendliest guys in the church. But...they were also in a committed same-sex relationship. So it caused us to think through our policies on that. Now, if you think *poker and movies* are controversial in conservative evangelical pastor circles...But it was a good discussion.

Anyway, just a couple of years ago I learned that two of the pastors in the cohort – good old West Texas boys – had gone to the District Superintendent and tried to have charges of misconduct brought against me over that. Now, thankfully someone in authority stood up for me and said I hadn't done anything wrong and they were actually thankful for some challenging conversation, but these two are now my fellow Presbyters – officers that want my head.

Well, they're going to get John Dunbar's head. They put him in chains on a wagon to take him back to the main fort where he is to be hanged as a traitor. On the way out they shoot and kill Two-Socks. I'm still not over that! You want to make a villain. You know, with his horse and his wolf, you could say they basically took John's car and his dog. That's the plot of *John Wick* right there!

And so I won't lie, it was pretty cathartic when the Sioux warriors come to rescue John and butcher every one of those soldiers. I know I'm supposed to turn the other cheek, but I'm being real, in my flesh I was cheering. They take John back to the tribe as winter approaches, but of course, you don't get to massacre soldiers and get away with it. They will bring the full weight of the US Army down on the tribe to punish the traitor and his allies.

And John knows it, so he rides off with Stands with Fists on his horse, trying to put some distance between themselves, the approaching soldiers and the beloved family they must leave behind. There are a lot of emotional goodbyes, but there is one in particular that I want to show you. There's a character we haven't talked about his morning – again, 3-hour movie – but he's a fierce warrior named Wind in His Hair. And in the beginning, he does not take to this white stranger trespassing on his land, not at all.

And there's a scene where he rides right up to John, full war paint, spear thrust in the air, and screams in his face – which of course at that point he can't understand – and he yells, "I am Wind in His Hair! Do you see that I am not afraid of you?" Over and over. Tough guy. Well, that makes their parting all the more powerful. Let's watch... **[Clip Friend 1:00]**

An enemy become a friend. During the musical recording in post-production, composer John Barry was reportedly so moved by that final scene that he broke down in tears while conducting that section of the score. Me too! By the way, Pope John Paul II once mentioned that John Barry's score was one of his favorite pieces of music. The Pope!

So the two lovers ride off into the winter mountains, pursued by the tracking soldiers. And the credits roll. That's it. End of movie. I remember leaving the theatre that Thanksgiving night and as we walked across the parking lot towards the cars, I said out loud, "They didn't show us what happened?" To which my uncle replied, "What, you wanted to see them all get murdered?" It was one of those statements with a silent "you moron" attached to the end. It wasn't very nice, but it was correct. There was no good ending to this story. Another civilization of human beings "was soon to pass into history."

You say, well it was unavoidable. Probably. You had two proud people's who wanted the same stretch of land and had completely different ideas of what that would look like. They couldn't both have what they wanted. In the end, there were more of us than there were of them. Again, it's a complicated story in real life. But it's certainly nothing to be proud of.

There were many, many atrocities committed so that we could settle this rich land. Go read about the Sand Creek Massacre led by Methodist preacher turned territorial officer, J.M. Chivington. He said, "Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians! I have come to kill Indians, and I believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians." A minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

And on November 28, 1864 in the Colorado territory, that's just what he did. They attacked a sleeping village at dawn – a village that had just signed a treaty with white troops – a village of 600 Cheyennes that included no more than 65 warriors, most of the men were out hunting buffalo. I won't give you all the gory details, but women were ravaged, children were shot point blank, babies were bayoneted. When the smoke had cleared and the screaming stopped, 300 Cheyanne old men, women and children lay dead and mutilated. Their body parts removed for souvenirs. And Chivington was proud of the results. What he had done was what most people in the west believed *had* to be done. That's our side. I'm sure not proud of it.

It's kind of depressing, especially when you think of how much if it was justified in the name of Christianity – a religion with the pretty famous ethic that you may be called to die for your enemy, but you're not supposed to kill them. That scene at the end of the pursuing soldiers reminded me of a quote by the great theologian and civil rights pioneer, Howard Thurman. He was a mentor to MLK.

In his great work, *Jesus and the Disinherited* he writes, “The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. ‘In him was life; and the life was the light of men.’ Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.”

So as a Christian, I have hope for the future. For Kingdom come. But what about for kingdom now? I won't lie to you, 18 years in, I wonder what it would have been like to have planted that safer church in the Metroplex instead of coming out to the frontier. Ministry is hard here. We're still running about 40% of our pre-COVID attendance. I don't have a single pastor friend up in DFW who is running under 80%. Just different cultures.

You know, I was thinking the other day about the famous story from Luke 17 about Jesus and the healing of the ten men with leprosy. To be a leper in that society was not just to have a disease - a disease

that was untreatable at the time - it was to have a social position. They were legally declared outcasts. They could not come around civilized folk. Ostracized from society in every way. In fact, if you came into contact with a leper, well, now *you're* an outcast as well.

And Jesus healed them. Changed their life forever. And famously, how many of them came back to say, “thanks”? Just one. One out of ten – probably not the healthiest return on investment. But I got to thinking, do you realize how many upstanding, good religious people Jesus pissed off by going to those lepers in the first place? How many people would not want to follow him if *those* are the kind of people he's hanging around?

It got me thinking about planting a church for pagans in the church planter's graveyard. You know, to say anything worth hearing, you run the risk of offending *someone*. Especially in these divided times. We made a decision years ago that when push came to shove, we'd offend church going people instead of seekers every time. The church people will be in another house of worship next week. But the seekers, this may be the only chance their going to give the gospel.

So that's what we do. We minister to the outsiders – knowing full well that a very small percentage are likely to actually stick with it. The parable of the seeds and the sower teaches that. Meanwhile, just by placing our focus there, we are turning away a lot of people that actually know how the religion game is supposed to work. It's probably not a very smart business model for growing a successful church.

*Expect...*it's what Jesus did. And I'm called to do what Jesus did. And it didn't really work out that well for him come to think of it. The soldiers caught up with him for sure. And they beat him. And they called him names. They'd of killed his dog if he had one. They sure enough killed him.

But that was Jesus' way. It was his way from the beginning. Not just the Easter story, Christmas too. The Incarnation. God come in human flesh. The Gospel of John tells the Christmas story this way, **John 1:14**, "*The Word became flesh and **made his dwelling** among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

That word "made his dwelling" is "tabernacled" – literally means he pitched his tent beside us. That's what the Incarnation is, Jesus got a tipi in our camp! That's a scandalous idea. The Early Church Fathers – Irenaeus in particular – fought long theological battles

in first years of the church with the Gnostics, who simply would not believe that God would lower himself to put on actually flesh. He must have just remained a ghost-like spirit. "Jesus would never associate with the rif-raf."

But of course he did. Read the story. That's pretty much the whole point of the gospel. That's what he came to do. He came to reconcile the world to himself. The *whole* world – the Cowboys *and* the Indians. And whatever else spilt you've got. As we saw at the beginning of the year in Paul's letter to the Romans, **Romans 5:10**, "*For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*" Not for his friends, but for his enemies.

The doctrine of the Incarnation means that Jesus came to live in a tipi in your village, to wear your clothes, to speak your language, to partake in your customs, to take you as his bride...and ultimately to die for you. See it's this reconciliation that is at the heart of the gospel – the true gospel. Movies like this provoke soul-searching. That's ok. Don't despair that people do terrible things in the name of the gospel, just resolve to do it right.

Do it the way Jesus did it. It's a crazy business plan, I'll grant you. The Bible doesn't hide from that. Listen to Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:13**, "*If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*" He's going to go on to call this "out of our mind" business, the ministry of reconciliation.

**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**, "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*"

God came to you, a pagan outsider and he said for all the world to hear, "Do you see that you are my friend? Can you see that you will always be my friend?" Join his tribe. Follow his "out of our mind" plan. Be Christ's ambassadors. Be agents of reconciliations. Not just to people in your tribe, not just to people who look and think and act like you. To the world. To the whole world. Soldiers and Sioux. Insiders and outsiders.

It will cost you. But when the spirit of Christ is in you, he'll give you the courage. And it will be worth it in the end.

Let's pray...