

*To The Spiritual Misfits,
And Their Soulmates*
Luke 3: 1-23

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At the end of the 16th Century, Johannes Kepler was studying to become a Lutheran pastor at the Lutheran Seminary of Tubingen.

Kepler inhabited a world in which virtually everybody believed the sun revolved around the earth in a circle. God placed Earth at the center of the universe, the sun and all other heavenly bodies revolved around the earth—this wasn't just a scientific view, but a theological one. Everyone knew it was true. It was the bedrock of truth itself. The authorities said so.

But Kepler knew it was wrong.

About 50 years earlier, Copernicus had asserted that the earth spins on its axis and revolves around the sun. Most people, especially those who mattered, roundly rejected and condemned Copernicus.

But Kepler knew Copernicus was right. At the age of 22, Kepler wrote his dissertation on the moon, claiming Copernicus was correct in observing the earth spins on its axis and revolves around the sun.

This didn't go over well.

Everyone, especially those who mattered, said Kepler was wrong.

A student at his university challenged Kepler to a public debate on the issue, but the university prohibited the debate. The topic was so outrageous, it didn't warrant debate.

Considered too radical and untrustworthy to be a Lutheran clergyman, the University banished Kepler to a more rustic part of Medieval Germany to teach math.

Kepler was a brilliant mathematician and acute watcher of the skies. Studying the planet Mars, Kepler plotted the orbit that Mars makes around the sun.

Then, studying the position of Mars relative to Earth, and using trigonometry, he calculated the distance between Earth and Mars, located the center of Earth's orbit, and calculated that Earth and all the other planets revolve around the Sun, not in a circle, but in elliptical patterns.

This was even more radical than Copernicus.

How Kepler saw and understood reality, based on his own observations and calculations, totally contradicted the dominant view of reality, the reigning cosmology, theology, ideology, the bedrock of truth itself. It's as if Kepler lived in his universe, and everyone else lived in theirs.

Here's where things got even more interesting.

In 1609, Kepler wrote what some consider to be the first work of science fiction, a story that he called, *The Dream*.

In Kepler's story, an astronomer from Earth travels to the moon where he encounters beings who inhabit the moon. He explains to these lunar beings that the moon revolves around Earth. And they roundly reject this news. No it doesn't, Earth revolves around the moon. It's obvious, just look.

The astronomer from Earth persists in his efforts to convince the lunar beings that the moon revolves around Earth, but the lunar beings refuse to believe him. And they pull out every

single argument that the churches, both Catholic and Lutheran, were using to claim the sun revolves around Earth.

It's brilliant. Not only science fiction, but brilliant political and religious satire.

This didn't go over well either.

The authorities arrested Kepler's mother and accused her of witchcraft. In Medieval Germany, the authorities tried thousands of women for witchcraft, found them guilty, and executed them, so this was serious business. The authorities cited passages from Kepler's story as proof that his mother was a witch. Kepler spent 6 years of his life and most of his money trying to prove his mother's innocence. The authorities eventually freed her, just days before she died.

Kepler paid a high price for seeing and understanding reality the way he did, and for knowing the dominant view was wrong. His mother paid an even higher price.

It's tough to buck the system. Including a system of thought.

This past week I went to see the movie, *A Hidden Life*. It is Terrence Malick's current movie, and since I'm a huge Terrence Malick fan, I had to see it on the big screen.

The movie portrays the relationship between Franz Jagerstatter and his wife, Franzy, two Austrian farmers who live with their three young daughters, Franz's mother, and Franzy's sister in their small village high up in the Austrian Alps in the era of Adolph Hitler, the Third Reich, and the Second World War.

The toxic ideology of the Nazis poisons the close-knit village in which they live. Virtually everyone in their village internalizes Nazi views, prejudices, gestures, and ways of acting, and everyone publically supports the German war effort as Poland and France fall.

Except Franz and Franzy Jagerstatter. They don't

For them, Nazi views and prejudices are wrong. Morally wrong. And what Germany is doing to its neighbors is wrong. Morally wrong.

Franz and Franzy are deeply distressed as they see, hear, and feel Nazism poison their village. The prejudice. The hatred. The pressure to conform. Each feels in their heart, in their gut, this is wrong. Each hears from their conscience, this is wrong.

So they quietly resist and refuse to go along.

They refuse to return the Nazi salute. They refuse to contribute to the village German war effort. They refuse to show up for the village Nazi rally.

And together, they suffer the wrath of their village. They're traitors.

There are some incredibly powerful scenes in the movie portraying Franz and Franzy standing alone against their sometimes incredulous, sometimes furious neighbors.

Franz and Franzy have only each other. They, along with their daughters, Franz's mother, and Franzy's sister, are outcasts.

When Franz receives the dreaded order to fight in the German Army, he refuses.

The Nazis imprison him. He's completely alone in prison, without his wife, without his soulmate, without the one person who sees the world, and feels the world, as he does.

With her husband in prison, Franzy lives a lonely life with her daughters and her unmarried sister, all of them despised by their village. Without her soulmate, Franzy is unbearably lonely.

The Nazis execute Franz in an unceremonious fashion.

You may think I've given the movie away with too many spoilers. But I haven't. It's a Terrance Malick movie after all, filled with philosophical and spiritual issues, and mythic themes, that I'll let you discover for yourself.

Johannes Kepler saw reality in a radically different way than most of his contemporaries. It's as if he lived in a different universe than his contemporaries.

He, and his mother, paid a high price.

Franz and Franzy Jagerstatter, two soulmates, saw reality in a radically different way than most of their contemporaries. It's as if they lived in a different moral universe than their contemporaries.

They paid a high price.

I think John the baptizer, and his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, saw reality in a radically different way than most of their contemporaries. It's as if they lived in a different spiritual universe than their contemporaries.

They paid a high price.

John the baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth stood out as different from their contemporaries.

Luke says John was out in the desert, set apart from his contemporaries, when a word of God came to him. John left the world he inhabited, as well as the world that inhabited him, behind. He left behind the way his contemporaries habitually lived, and the way they habitually saw things, thought about things, and felt about things.

A word of God came to John. He had a deep and profound spiritual experience. He saw anew, heard anew, thought anew, felt anew. And John was never the same again.

John then headed to the Jordan and begged people, warned people, castigated people to transform their hearts. And he forgave their sin, all the harm they'd done. And he told them to share, and not to profit off others, or steal from others, or lie. And he baptized them, as a sign of renewal, hoping that they too would see anew, hear anew, think anew, feel anew. That they would never be the same again.

Then he criticized Herod. And Herod executed him.

Jesus also goes out to the desert, after John baptizes him.

Jesus is set apart from his contemporaries. In the desert, he repudiates lies and he overcomes the temptation to be popular and powerful in the conventional sense. And he is never the same again.

Jesus then reveals to people, through his words, his actions, his way of relating to people, his presence with people, what he calls the kingdom of God. Both Jesus and the kingdom of God are radically dissimilar to the world. To paraphrase Karl Barth, they contradict the world in ways that are full of promise. And the authorities execute him.

John and Jesus saw reality in a radically different way than most of their contemporaries.

And this set them radically apart.

However, both had disciples. Both found people who resonated in some deep and powerful way with their vision of reality, and the way they embodied their reality, and spoke about their reality. A few people drew very close to John and Jesus, and followed them, and were transformed in some deep and profound ways by them.

Did John and Jesus have soulmates?

Franz and Franzy Jagerstatter were soulmates.

Were John and Jesus soulmates? Two people who shared the same vision, thought the same way, felt the same way?

Was the disciple Peter a soulmate to Jesus? The Rock. The disciple who followed Jesus the longest, and the closest, to his death?

Was the disciple John a soulmate to Jesus, the beloved disciple?

Was Mary Magdalene?

With how many people did Jesus have a deep bond?

It's fascinating to think that Jesus had deep bonds with people, soul-mates even, and yet he still stood out, he was still set apart. He was still radically dissimilar, he contradicted the world.

This morning I'd like to acknowledge those who're radically dissimilar to the world's way, and who contradict it in ways filled with promise. And the price they pay.

Those who see a truth that others don't see, and are punished by those who insist on persisting with what's wrong.

Those who see the light when others don't, and pray with all their might that the darkness will not conquer them.

Those who hear a word that others don't hear, and who speak it, and are mocked, reviled, or killed. Or simply ignored.

Those who refuse to do what their heart feels is wrong, what their conscience tells them is wrong, when everyone else thinks it's right.

Those who do what their heart feels is right, what their conscience tells them is right, when everyone else thinks it's wrong.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted."

I'd also like to acknowledge and lift up the soulmates to these people. Those who, at least in part, maybe fully, understand both what the dissimilar person sees, and the price paid for seeing it. Those who feel what the dissimilar person feels, and who feel deeply for the person.

There's no deeper bond than a soulmate.

Xavier Rudd sings in one of his songs, there's no greater pain than losing a soulmate.

So here's to the spiritual misfits. And here's to soulmates.