

Recommended Viewing

"The Matrix." First a few warnings: this movie is very intense, disturbing, and challenging and provides enough possibilities for discussion to fill ten weekly one-hour meetings. Do not attempt to fully grasp and comprehend every implication, symbol, and interpretation within one sitting nor drive your loved ones away with more than perhaps an hour of discussion at any one sitting.

Why is it such a recommendable movie then? The definitions of reality, perception, love, life, and even spirituality with which the main characters wrestle are the most fundamental and essential concepts, upon which one could ever reflect. The integration of all of these within this movie may even offer subtle clues to understanding what faith truly is; faith in ourselves and in some sort of higher guiding (perhaps divine) will.

From the very beginning of the movie, the tension between freedom of choice and pre-ordained fate is almost palpable. In some ways it forms a sort of dance through which the body of the movie and the lives of the central characters move, engaging in self-sacrifice, altruism, courage, determination, and an all-encompassing willingness (perhaps even eagerness) to grow, even to eventually out-grow fear itself.

A lot of different things are happening during each moment of the movie, so it is advisable to see the movie more than once and to give your mind and emotions time to rest in between viewings. At no point do the characters rest upon the identities assigned to them by others. Rather they work to sift through all of the speculation to discern what the truth of themselves is and what their limitations may or may not actually be.

The fundamental point of beginning the adventure of discovering true life, however, is the simple act of saying "yes" to the opportunity. The old popular creeds of "don't get involved" and so forth, must be abandoned before anything good can be accomplished. At no point is anyone given any guarantee of success. Whereas within our contemporary society, all danger and risk is carefully hidden, sugar-coated, and camouflaged, within the world of this movie it is clear and direct, to those who have the eyes and willingness to see it. The marvelous example of the film's main characters is that they encounter this clear and direct understanding of risk with faith in themselves, faith in each other, and faith in communications they have no way of understanding at the times they receive them.

The supreme blessing is that their faith is ultimately rewarded and because of this, the world will never be the same again.

Subscription Information:

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

Trusting the Unexpected

Who said it first, "Life is what happens while you're making other plans"? Perhaps it matters less who said it first, than that it remains as stubbornly and universally true as the witticism, "change is the only constant in the universe." This only truly becomes a problem, however, when the response includes a relatively inflexible attitude.

Though life may offer unpleasant as well as pleasant experiences, assuming an adversarial stance toward its events and insights leads only to various degrees and forms of mental and emotional illness. I base that statement not upon any formal psychological education, but rather upon common sense. When a person begins to lie to himself or herself about what has happened, about the true nature of the person with whom he or she is dealing, or about what a person or circumstance is truly able to provide, a myriad of ever greater problems quickly follow.

Among the uncomfortable realities with which we battle (which is not the same as assuming an adversarial stance toward life's events and insights), are the facts that we currently live within a world that is economically obsessed and that justice is not reliably one of the guiding principles of human civilization. It continues to irk me that perhaps the majority of humanity's gifted scientists and artists have had to spend inordinate amounts of time in activities quite unrelated to their gifts and strengths, simply to provide the basics of food, clothing, and shelter for themselves. How many discoveries and visionary works have thereby gone uncreated, one can only speculate. Though quite unaware, we are all nevertheless the victims of this

misappropriation of human potential.

I doubt that anyone will argue that within the American judicial system, it does not matter what is true; it only matters what one can prove. Shall we abandon the principle of "innocent until proven guilty"? I suspect that would allow even more evil things to transpire and thus I would answer that question with a most emphatic, "NO!" but this is little comfort to the one who has been raped in some way but lacks the evidence needed to prosecute the perpetrator.

What of the brilliant and gifted educator, minister, musician, engineer, or humanitarian who is nevertheless forced to consider undesirable options, simply because their gifts are not appreciated? That, specifically, is what I want to address within this article.

If we see nothing more than the contrast between a person's qualifications and a specific array of very limited opportunities, we may spend days, months, or even years futilely demanding justice.

If instead we begin to see the larger world and the ripples that any single event may have, expanding outward across the surface of the lake of humanity, the smallest act of kindness can become transcendent. As much as I may detest the various corporate "day-jobs" I've had, for example, I know that I would not have even met many of the people I did, unless I had been willing to accept those job assignments. What influence I may have had on any particular person's life, God knows better than I do. As much as I believe that my presence in each of those places was not primarily about the job itself, I must also be mindful and respectful of my

limitations and know when my strength relative to a particular situation or challenge has been exhausted and be willing to move on to something else.

Additionally, history is filled with stories of men and women who endured a wide range of disparate and incongruous things, only to find that all of these together gave them a breadth of vision and understanding which was essential to a larger role they played later in life, which was unimaginable to everyone until it actually came to pass.

Within our present time are resources which suggest that anyone can become anything, that quite literally nothing is beyond our reach, but this rings as hollow as the attempts by noted individuals within ancient folklore and legends to defy the power of Fate. That we have perhaps greater resources (by some measure or other) than countless generations before us is reasonably obvious. Yet a peculiar mysterious selective process still seems to mark some for success and some for failure in various endeavors, without any obvious regard for the degree of excellence (or lack thereof) that any particular person possesses. The best actors, authors, writers, and engineers are not always the ones who receive the highest awards. Sometimes this is blamed upon economic concerns and sometimes upon social connections. All things considered, it does seem that a significant (if perhaps also sometimes small) portion of success is anchored in a rather fickle divine blessing, suggesting that we should aim to harmonize with the uncertainties of Life rather than superimpose our will upon them.

Another way to put it would be a personal quote I offered in a past newsletter: "It is just as important to listen to the music as to dance with all your heart." One cannot plan on dancing a beautiful waltz if the band is playing a polka. Neither can one do an exceptional demonstration of the tango when the music has a decidedly foxtrot rhythm. I recall seeing a television interview with the actress "Charo" several years ago, in which she complained that no one would

hire her to be anything other than the "kootchie-kootchie" girl (the role by which she became widely known to the American public) even though she was actually one of the best Flamenco guitarists in the world (further evidenced by a demonstration immediately following the interview). One has to wonder how it is that her comedic role would convey so much more to the general public than her guitar-playing would, why comedy is so much more in demand than a particular artistic style of guitar music.

In a basic psychology course in college, I was introduced to a diagram entitled, "Maslow's hierarchy of needs." Created by a psychologist with that last name, the diagram was essentially a pyramid with basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter at the bottom and more abstract needs such as "self-actualization" at the top. I recently noticed the diagram on the cover of a psychology magazine and mentioned it to the coworker charged with distributing the magazine with the question, "so what happens if someone makes it all the way to the top of the pyramid and then finds himself (or herself) thrown into situations more expected and typical of the bottom of the pyramid? How does a person with so much more depth of understanding about life revert to making decisions (and being happy with them) in which the priority is simply survival?"

It is certainly a much more daunting challenge, but one with significantly more value also. Before one understands about psychological, emotional, and spiritual issues, the fight for survival is fairly simple and uncomplicated. After one has gained any degree of understanding about creative potential, spiritual identity, and emotional honesty, the struggle for survival must include psychological, emotional, and spiritual survival in addition to physical survival. On one hand, the goal has much more definition and description. On the other hand, a lot more possibilities are quickly eliminated

because they do not satisfy all concerns. This may give the impression that the person is "too picky", while in actuality the person is being far more intelligent and responsible than he or she has been in the past, diligently searching for the shoes that really and truly fit rather than accepting any pair into which he or she can get his or her feet. The reward for such diligence is a journey that proceeds quickly, efficiently, safely, and beautifully; much more so than would have been otherwise possible. The cost is the acceptance of a later starting time, because more time is spent upon preparation and planning.

I titled this article as I did, because one of the main qualities of such preparation and planning, of such diligent searching for just the right pair of shoes, is the need to trust the unexpected and the unknown. Because the form and appearance of the equipment and help we need does not always come (perhaps even rarely comes) in the form and appearance we expect, it is imperative that we keep our eyes and ears open to the possibility that anything may be the provision God has sent to help us along the way. We may think we know our destination and arrival time, but the sudden appearance of a "detour" sign along any highway is generally ignored only at our own peril and the detour may in fact have a higher purpose than we ever imagined encountering along the routes of our individual journeys.

"Peace
which is based upon
ignorance rather than upon
understanding
is like a balloon without the
warm breath of life within it
and will rise no higher than
the dirt beneath
our feet."
---Sister Who

"ReInventing the Sacred Clown"

It is a book begun several years ago which is at this point perhaps half written. In gratitude for your continued support and encouragement, I am willing to offer to subscribers of this newsletter, a manuscript copy of each chapter as it is completed. There are fifteen chapters and I hope to have at least the first two chapters finished by the end of January.

Essentially, this is Sister Who's autobiography, responding to many of the questions and concerns expressed to me during the past ten years of being Sister Who and describing various experiences and unconventional teachers who shaped me into the person who would become Sister Who.

I will certainly let everyone know when the book is finally published, but do not anticipate that happening until probably early in 2003 at best. For those who do not wish to wait until then to read what the book will contain, I ask only that you send me an extra two dollars or so to cover the cost of paper, printing, and postage, for each chapter I send you. Please let me know if you wish to take advantage of this offer.