

Welcome

Maybe because our country was formed by a rebellion, we love rebellion stories, don't we? What are your favorite rebellion stories?

Obviously one of the classics is Star Wars - the saga of how a simple moisture farmer took down an evil empire. But maybe my favorite is arguably the greatest film of all time: Mad Max: Fury Road.

Hopefully you've seen Fury Road. If not, here's a quick summary. Title aside, the film is really about Imperator Furiosa (played by Charlize Theron). In the post-apocalyptic Australian wasteland, water has become humanity's most precious commodity, and the fearsome Immortan Joe controls the water supply. He's built a huge empire by controlling water.

And the movie is about how one of his trusted lieutenants rebels against him and brings his empire down. That lieutenant is Furiosa. Appropriately, the film ends with her taking over and giving oppressed humanity all the water they need.

That's the thing about rebellion movies: they end at what in so many ways is the *beginning* of the story. Because successful rebellions are about the *end* of something old. Which clears the way for the new goodness - Star Wars' Galactic Republic or Furiosa's rule or the US of A. Take your pick.

Of course part of the reason for that is that movies are all about the action and drama, and rebellions have tons of that. But when we zoom out and look at what happens to rebellions in real life, maybe there's another reason, a reason the director of Fury Road, George Miller hit on.

He's making a Furiosa prequel film, and in an interview, he was asked what this iconic fan-favorite's future was. He said:

"There's two ways to go. One is utopian. I imagined the first thing she'd do in line with that is go up and release the water... But following history, what tends to happen... Joseph Campbell said that the usual story is that today's hero becomes tomorrow's tyrant. You love what you've built, or saved, too much... You become the orthodoxy. You develop the dogma and basically then you have to protect it. That tends to be the rhythm of these things."

Today's hero becomes tomorrow's tyrant.

Ouch. We don't want to think of our heroes that way. And yet history proves it over and over again.

So my question for us today: how does a church in the wild keep from becoming a church of tyrants? How can we remain revolutionary?

Today is Pentecost, so we're going to find our answer in the irresistible pull of the Holy Spirit, who brings us to life and calls us to follow Jesus into the wild ways of God's Kingdom!

Message

Since Easter, we've been in a series called Church in the Wild. Hip hop fans will recognize that as a play on the song by Kanye West and Jay-Z, from their album *Watch the Throne*. On that song, they meditate

*Human beings in a mob
What's a mob to a king?
What's a king to a god?*

*What's a god to a non-believer
Who don't believe in anything?*

*Will he make it out alive?
No church in the wild.*

My friend and hip hop scholar Dr. Daniel White Hodge observes that there's a progression in this verse, from human to mob to king to god. But then they ask the game-breaking question: what's even a *god* to a non-believer?

Does any of this matter to the person who just refuses to play by the rules? Does any of this affect the unbeliever who refuses to try to climb the ladder of success?

Kanye and Jay-Z call that space "the wild". The place outside the status quo. What we might call "out of bounds". The opposite of "wild" is "civilization". Where the streets are paved and the streetlights stay on. Where fences keep out the bad.

They insist there's no church in the wild.

But throughout this series, we've seen that church *must* be in the wild, that the wild is where the church began, and where it thrives.

On Easter, we saw that Jesus is a man of the wild, a revolutionary who was executed because he was too dangerous to be left alive, and yet who God raised to life to prove his wild, revolutionary way is good and beautiful and true.

Turn with us to [Acts 1](#).

Today is Pentecost, so we're going to go back to the beginning of Acts before again going to the very end. Because the question I want to ask today is, "How does a church *stay* wild?"

Acts begins with Jesus about to ascend to the throne of heaven. His final words function as an overview of what the book of Acts will be about:

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” -- [Acts 1:6–8 NLT](#)

The apostles think they’re thinking big - they think this is about making Israel great again. But Jesus lets them know it’s way bigger than they thought - when the Holy Spirit comes on them - on Pentecost - they’re going to take Jesus’ good news from Jerusalem to the whole earth.

Now, from the perspective of those apostles, Jerusalem - the capital of Israel - was the center of the world. If there was a “wild” for them, it would have been Rome, the seat of the evil Empire. Rome was the opposite of everything Jesus stood for (remember they crucified him, after all).

Turn with us to [Acts 28](#).

So the book of Acts is all about the Holy Spirit taking Jesus’ good news not just to all the Jews, but to *everyone* Jew and Gentile alike. Appropriately, then, the book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome, the very heart of the Jewish wild. Here’s what Acts tells us:

Three days after Paul’s arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, “Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, because they found no cause for the death sentence. But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come...”

For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him. -- [Acts 28:17-20, 28-31 NLT](#)

Acts ends with the Holy Spirit fulfilling the mission Jesus set out: announce the good news of his resurrection and the coming Kingdom of God both in the heart of Jerusalem and in the furthest reaches of the Wild.

But we know what happened *after* that. We know that the Church made our home in the heart of the Empire, and eventually lost so much of that wild, revolutionary way Jesus showed us.

We’ve explored in this series again and again how churches far too often oppress, silence and destroy those in the wild.

So what I want to do today is look back at all we’ve done in this series, along with help from Dan Hodge. I want to review his markers of a truly wild church. Because the reality is we live in a city - yet we’re called to be wild.

The first of Dan's markers of a wild church is one that acts redemptively to bring the spiritual power of love and cohesion to the present moment, while aware of what it will cost them.

A wild church acts redemptively to bring the spiritual power of love and cohesion to the present moment, while aware of what it will cost them.

We saw this in the story of Stephen, who stood before a crowd and retold their story. He offered them a more true, more honest, account of their history - one that acknowledged that they had a long history of missing God at work in the world.

That was an important invitation because it invited them to allow for the possibility that, in opposing Jesus, they were repeating the sins of their ancestors. But they couldn't allow for that possibility, so they lynched Stephen.

We too, as a congregation, are called to stand with the marginalized and oppressed. We're called to oppose white supremacy and violence, to work for true justice and flourishing for those on the margins. And we have to acknowledge the real cost of taking such a stand.

It's always been true that to stand with the marginalized is divisive. And that feels bad to a lot of us because we want Catalyst to be a church for everyone.

But here's the hard truth: a church that is truly for everyone does not tolerate the sins of hatred, injustice, racism or any other forms of bigotry. If we are truly a space for the most vulnerable, it means we protect the vulnerable. It means we say, "You are welcome here. But you will do no violence to any of our siblings."

Until we're a church for the most vulnerable, we're not truly a church for everyone. Because that's what it *really* means for us to be a church for everyone.

Next we encountered the radical conversion of Saul, who was present at Stephen's lynching and was radicalized there to use death and the threat of death to stamp out the Jesus movement - until Jesus himself confronted Saul. After Jesus turned Saul's whole world upside down, it took him nearly two decades to deconstruct and reconstruct his faith to be prepared for God's calling on him. It took a lot of courage on Saul's part - and also a lot of courage for those first Christians who risked welcoming their former enemy.

Dan observes that **A wild church builds relationships that allow for growth rather than moralism and authoritarianism.**

Moralism - making religion about rules and laws - and Authoritarianism - religion that insists we all be a certain way - would not have changed Saul. It's anathema to a truly vibrant, living faith that can thrive in today's world.

Here at Catalyst, we work to be a church that welcomes deconstruction and reconstruction. That's why, for instance, we focus on prayer every week in response to the message - we don't want to tell you how to behave or think. Rather, we announce Jesus' good news and then all take space to listen. We trust GOD knows your next right step, so if we'll be faithful to listen, God will speak. We don't want behavior modification or obedience. We want real transformation!

Once Paul was on his missionary journeys, we explored his encounters in Philippi. Three people unlikely to receive Jesus' good news - Lydia the textile merchant, the demon-possessed girl and the Roman jailer - all came to know Jesus because the Spirit was preparing them for Paul's arrival.

According to Dan, **A wild church Accepts the true nature of people and encourages them to change toward consciousness and healing.**

This is exactly what Paul learned in Philippi: Paul's job is to meet people where they are and trust the Spirit is already at working, bringing them to find their true selves in Jesus and be healed of both personal and systemic oppression.

Here at Catalyst, we're learning to work for both personal and systemic justice. We're building relationships with people who are not like us - like our friends at the Sachse Mosque. We're dreaming about new relationships with the Wichita nation, the Native stewards of the land on which we built our building and on which many of us now live.

And we specifically design everything we do to be accessible to anyone whether they have a church background or not. Because we know that Jesus' good news doesn't belong inside four walls. He's for the whole world.

We followed Paul to Athens, the intellectual center of his day, to his announcement of Jesus' good news to the Athenians. There, Paul broke with any sort of evangelistic conventions to frame Jesus' resurrection in terms the Athenians could understand. And it was all to show them that God has come to them and for them.

Dan observes that **A wild church rejects and reinterprets standardized ideas of salvation, church, religion.**

Paul didn't let anything stand in the way of telling the Athenians about Jesus. So too, we believe here at Catalyst that Jesus' good news is for everyone. More than that, we believe the Holy Spirit is *already* at work in and around them. Our job is not to take Jesus to anyone. Jesus is already with them. Rather, Jesus calls us to announce the good news: God is with them the same way God is with us.

[Dan's stuff]

We end today in Rome. Paul is at the very heart of the Empire, the seat of Caesar himself. And the Spirit has made a way for Paul to announce Jesus' good news even to the wildest people in those first Christians' imagination: the Romans themselves.

It might strike you as strange that a wild church would care to make its way to the heart of the Empire, but this tells us much about Jesus' own goals and designs for the world.

As Dan observes, **A wild church challenges status quo and argues for equal rights, justice and systemic change while allowing those in the systems to and follow.**

This is what we've seen over and over in Acts. Those first Christians challenged the status quo of both Rome *and* Jerusalem. They found themselves persecuted by... well everyone. But nothing could stop the Holy Spirit from leading the Church to announce God's new kingdom *for everyone*. It's for Jews and Romans. Men and women. The wealthy and the poor. The demon-possessed and the self-righteous. The insiders and the outsiders.

That's what's truly so amazing about Jesus' good news: it's not trying to pull down one evil empire to replace it with another. God's kingdom is upside down. Totally different.

It's for everyone who wants to be part.

Communion + Examen

The only requirement to come to Jesus' table is to *respond*.

How has the Holy Spirit been teaching me in this series?

How have I been distracted, detached or avoiding the Spirit's call?

How can I choose to follow the Spirit this Summer?

Assignment + Blessing

How is the Spirit calling you this Summer?