

Bill's Bestowals:
"The Stranger from out of Town"

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth."
(John 1:14)*

It's time for "Jeopardy." Are you ready? Only one question, and the category is "Western Movies." Here we go:

In Westerns, the hero of the story almost always comes from ... (where)?

I've asked this question of groups before and I usually hear answers like Texas, Wyoming and New York. But the actual answer, as I'm sure you have already guessed (wink-wink), is from ... "out of town."

Presbyterian pastor and theologian Dale Bruner noted this: "In westerns, the hero always comes from out of town. Common, hard-working people have somehow made a mess of things, bad hombres have seized power in the town, and now a stranger has to arrive on the scene to set things right."

Check out the 1950's Western, "Shane." In the opening scene, a lone cowboy – Shane – comes riding up to a homesteader's cabin in the Rocky Mountains and befriends the resident family. Pretty soon, along comes the Ryker gang – the "bad hombres." Shane recognizes their evil purpose and starts to work against them. Shane ultimately saves the day for the homesteaders.

Many others Westerns follow this same kind of script, including comedic Westerns (Shanghai Noon, The Three Amigos), and cartoon westerns (Fievel Goes West, Rango).

Dr. Bruner pointed out that Americans don't seem to recognize it, but Westerns tell the story of the Gospel! People on earth have problems. We've "made a mess of things." We've surrendered our freedom to destructive powers, and we can't free ourselves from those powers, so the solution has to come from somewhere else – from someONE else – from a "hero from out of town!"

Chapter one of John's Gospel makes it clear that such a hero has come to rescue us. *"In the beginning was the Word .. and the Word was God ... He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him."* (John 1:1, 10) The Son of God came as a stranger! And then, in verse 14 (see above), we see that *"the Word became flesh"* and came to live among us!

Then, at Easter (especially), we consider the lengths to which our Hero, Jesus, went to rescue us from evil, whether self-inflicted or brought by evil hombres.

One thing I noticed in Westerns whose plots follow the "Hero from out of town" pattern: In each case, the "hero" has 1) many people who see the results of his actions and cheer him on "Way to go! Thanks!", but also 2) a few who recognize the importance of what he has done, and who say, "I want to join in your cause and be like you!"

This season, consider: which are you?

"May the Lord bless and keep you ..." always! Pastor Bill