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1 Corinthians 16:13-14

At the Movies: Back to the Future

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1 Corinthians 16:13-14 Common English Bible

Stay awake, stand firm in your faith, be brave, be strong. Everything should be done in love.

**Show Back to the Future clip**

I love this part in Back to the Future. Doc Brown is so confident in his time traveling invention that he has ultimate faith in his machine. But, Marty McFly is not so sure. Marty is distancing himself from the Doc because he does not want to possibly get run over. And then Doc Brown grabs Marty and makes sure that he stays in place. Doc Brown is telling Marty to have faith, to stand firm, to be brave and to be strong.

The Apostle Paul shares that sentiment to the people in the town of Corinth at the end of his letter to them. As he ends his letter to the people there, he is encouraging them. “Stay awake, stand firm in your faith, be brave, be strong. Everything should be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

The Message translation which is more of a paraphrase says, “Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you’ve got, be resolute, and love without stopping.” But how do you hold tight to your convictions and stand firm in your faith when you have great people like Chris Mims die or a child diagnosed with cancer or bigotry against LGBT folks or Muslims? How do you stand firm in your faith when there is so much tragedy and death and violence and hatred?

The other week our refrigerator broke and I called our refrigerator repairman Darrell. As Darrell left, I got a text from my neighbor asking if I was okay because her 7 year old son had seen a black man with a backpack leaving our house. I said to her, yes that was Darrell, he is a great guy who fixes my refrigerator. How did it happen that we have such fear in our world about people who have a different color of skin then we do? And when we read about the horrible death of 28 year old Sandra Bland in a jail cell we are so desensitized because we have heard the stories of death of Eric Garner nearly a year ago after being placed in a police chokehold. And we remember 18 year old Michael Brown shot in Ferguson, Missouri; 12 year old Tamir Rice shot by Cleveland police; and 25 year old Freddie Gray who died in the police van after being arrested for having a switchblade. Then we remember the nine people who were killed in Bible study at their church in Charleston, South Carolina.

On Sandra Bland’s facebook page she wrote, “What I need you guys to understand is that being a black person in America is very, very hard.”[[1]](#footnote-2) We live in a nation where if you are African American, you can be one police encounter away from death. Any age, any gender, any socioeconomic class. How do you stand firm in your faith when this is the world that we live in? How do you still feel hope and still work for change?

I have to tell you that sometimes I feel like Marty McFly. And I need a Doc Brown to hold me steady. I lose hope that we can work together to transform this world. There is so much division and hatred and violence. I need God to restore my hope. I need the community of faith to hold me in place and hold me steady.

In Nadia Bolz-Weber’s book Pastrix, she talks about the events that they have for those who are new to that community of faith. People share about what drew them to that church, which is called House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver. People love the community, the singing, and the fact that they feel comfortable to be themselves. Pastor Nadia speaks last and tells them that she loves all of those things about their church too.  She loves being in a spiritual community where she doesn’t have to add to or take away from her own story to be accepted.  But then she shares something that might not be expected.  She says, “this community will disappoint them.  It’s a matter of when, not if.”  The church will let them down or Pastor Nadia will say something stupid and hurt their feelings.  She then invites them on this side of their inevitable disappointment to decide if they’ll stick around after it happens.  If they choose to leave when the church doesn’t meet their expectations, they won’t get to see how the grace of God can come in and fill the holes left by the community’s failure, and that’s just too beautiful and too real to miss. Pastor Nadia closes by saying, “Welcome to House for All Sinners and Saints.  We will disappoint you” (p. 54).

God works to redeem my life and your life and this world. I believe in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I think about the tragedy in Charleston. It was the power of Christ crucified and risen that we saw in the people of Emanuel AME Church who welcomed a stranger into their midst and shared with him the Word of God.[[2]](#footnote-3) It was the power of Christ crucified and risen that we saw in the tens of thousands who flooded into churches to pray and lament over that unspeakable violence.[[3]](#footnote-4) It was the power of Christ crucified and risen that we saw in the families’ response in court. Just when hate thought it could win – when hate thought it could conquer hope – we saw people of the Gospel say no.

Forgiveness comes from a power greater than ourselves. Forgiveness comes from the power of Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is more powerful than our hate, more powerful than our despair, more powerful than our pride.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Jesus tells a story about the Kingdom of God in Matthew where a landowner goes out and hires laborers in the morning and agrees to pay them the daily wage.  But then every few hours he goes and finds more workers and brings them in.  In the afternoon he goes to the marketplace and sees folks standing around and is like, ‘Why aren’t you working?’ and they say, ‘because no one would hire us,’ and he sends them into his vineyard to work the last two hours of the day.  When the work is done is pays everyone the same thing” even the early risers who worked all day in the scorching heat and the slept-till-noon new hires.  The landowner says, “You’re angry because I’m generous?”

God is gracious and loving and kind. And God is with us in the middle of our messy world. There is no answer as to why there is suffering, but I do know that God is with us, Emmanuel. We go to God for answers, and we get God’s presence with us.[[5]](#footnote-6) God weeps and God suffers with us. God does not initiate suffering, but God transforms it. And God transforms us. And that transformation looks messy. It looks like recovering alcoholics and reconciliation between family members who don’t actually deserve it. It looks like managing to admit when you are wrong and not mentioning when you are right. It looks like fresh starts and forgiveness and letting go. Right now God is reaching into the dirt of our world, into the dirt of our lives and resurrecting us from the graves we dig for ourselves through our violence, our lies, our selfishness, our arrogance and our addictions.[[6]](#footnote-7) And God keeps loving us back to life over and over.[[7]](#footnote-8) Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/07/16/sandra-bland-tried-to-post-bail-before-allegedly-committing-suicide.html?via=desktop&source=facebook [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/06/sermon-on-the-martyrs-of-charleston-and-the-power-of-christ-crucified-and-risen/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/06/sermon-on-the-martyrs-of-charleston-and-the-power-of-christ-crucified-and-risen/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/06/sermon-on-the-martyrs-of-charleston-and-the-power-of-christ-crucified-and-risen/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Pastrix. Nadia Bolz-Weber. 2013. P. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Pastrix. Nadia Bolz-Weber. 2013. P. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Pastrix. Nadia Bolz-Weber. 2013. P. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)