Sunday September 26, 1982

"E.T. REPORTS" Matthew 18:1-4

If you haven't yet seen the movie, "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial," I hope you will do so. It's not often that I recommend a moview, but once in a while there is one that is unique and special.

As you know this is a movie about a creature from another part of the creation, another planet, but it's different from most movies that have carried a similar theme. Steven Spielberg, the producer and director has been quoted as saying that he wanted to make a picture that assumed that visitors from space did not have to be monsters or carriers of evil, but just might be superior beings coming to us in a spirit of trust and openness. And that's what happens in this movie.

The story begins with a scene of a spaceship preparing for departure from a forest overlooking downtown Los Angeles. Strange men arrive in automobiles. The arriving vehicles are photographed as being menacing monsters viewed from the vantage point of a child. We never see above the waist of the men who are apparently attempting to capture the space visitor. The sounds in the forest are a mixture of owl hoots and the cries of anguish of an unknown creature.

The creature, it turns out, is one of the spaceships's passengers, inadvertently left behind when the ship suddenly departs. Why is this "extra-terrestrial" too far from the mothership? Because his curiousity has drawn him too far away to make it back to the ship on time.

In a book recently published entitled, "E.T." and based on the movie, we learn a few more things about the "extra-terrestrial" which we didn't learn from the movie. E.T. and his fellow crew members are botanists. They have been to the earth before to collect living specimens and they have been to other planets as well. They come back every few million years.

These creatures have a distince advantage over human botanists, they can talk with plants and plants talk to them. Remember the scene early in the movie where

E.T. hides in the tool shed? A little potted ivy piped up with a warning about the garden tools--"Don't stab yourself in the foot."

We also learn from the book that E.T. is 10 million years old and comes from a planet with weak gravity and which has a marshy surface on which E.T.'s species get around by half walking and half floating. That's why it's tough for him to cope with earth's gravity and it gradually wears him down.

So E.T. is left behind and is lost. What do you do when you're lost, millions of miles from home, surrounded by frightening creatures? You do what E.T. the old Botanist did--first you find a friend. And so the movie is among other things a magical story about two unforgettable friends; a gentle being from another world who is stranded on earth, hunted, afraid and alone. . . .and a ten year old boy who finds him and takes him home and then helps him to return to his own world. The children are the heroes and heroines in the movie.

I think the movie has several religious themes. To begin with it's a story of love between two different creatures from two different worlds. E.T's heart is filled with love-power. He wins the hearts of children. He has no weapons and is no threat, but adults are automatically suspicious of anyone who is different and who is from another world. They assume he is here for evil purposes.

The children on the other hand, especially Elliot, the ten year old, respond to more than what their eyes can see. They sense that E.T. is a loving creature who will do them no harm.

After I saw the movie, the Bible story read earlier from the Gospel of MATTHEW came to my mind where Jesus says--"Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Jesus knew that children respond more easily unless they have been taught very early to distrust that which is different. Jesus knew that and that's why he tells us to be more like children in our approach to the world and in our approach to God

The movie has also a religious theme in that it helps us to broaden our view about God's Creation. God's creation is much larger and grander than we can ever imagine. The earth is but a tiny dot in the universe. God is more than just an earth God. At the same time, the Creator God who is present in all of creation loves us and cares for us, and I BELIEVE this same Loving Creator God loves and cares for creatures in other parts of the creation as well.

In addition, E.T. is a film filled with hope. Love can transcend all barriers. The over-all message is, "We are going to make it because we have the capacity for love.

One person wrote after seeing the film, "The extra-terrestrial is like a Christ figure. He appears mysteriously from another place. He is capable of extra-terrestrial powers, and of humanizing himself in order to communicate. E.T. is of extra-ordinary stuff which is both frightening and attractive as his young friend Elliot and others discover. Clearly his kingdom is not of this world.

But what do you suppose E.T. reported to his fellow creatures once he returned to his home? How did he describe we human beings and how we live? What did he have to say about the way in which he was accepted and treated? Here are some of the things he might have said in his own words.

When I discovered that the space ship had left without me, I wandered around aimlessly for a time. I was afraid that the inhabitants of the planet earth would capture me and put me on display. I knew they were searching for me and it didn't seem to be a very friendly search.

The adult human beings are certainly big creatures and very strange looking. I'm sure they believed that our ship had come to the earth to do them harm so their first impulse was to attack us and capture us.

I was able to hide in a small building near another larger building where the humans lived. My good friends, the plants were a help to me. They told me things about the

humans that I needed to know. One of the human creatures named Elliot was about my size and was very trusting and open toward me. He did not have the same kind of fear as the large human creatures. He was ready to accept me, love me and take care of me.

I think the big human beings, called adults, for the most part had difficulty in believing there could be creatures from another planet. Some of them seemed to think they were the only intelligent life in God's creation. The small human beings I met who are called children, have more open minds and are willing to consider new thoughts and thus are able to respond to and accept creatures like us without any prejudice.

These human creatures have the same basic five senses as we do--seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. The difference between them and us, as far as I could tell from my brief visit among them is that they tend not to experience much except through those five senses even though they have the ability to do so.

In other words, they tend to believe that what is essential in this creation is visible to the eye, or can be heard by the ear, or smelled by the nose, or tasted by the mouth or touched by the hand or other part of the body. This belief limits their perception and their potential.

Their central nervous system therefore does not let in' many new things or experiences, but rather screens them out. They practice selective perception. That's why they tend to see or experience only s small part of the things in their environment.

Of course, they need as we need the ability to screen out extraneous stimuli in order to focus on certain things when necessary. But this has caused these human creatures to mistakenly believe that what they perceive as reality through their five senses is all there is. They miss so much that is beautiful in creation.

Because of this, they also tend to see things in bits and pieces and have trouble seeing or experiencing the world around them in its totality, in its wholeness, in its magical wonder. They forget that the whole is greater

than the sum of its parts. The large human beings, the adults, had difficulty in seeing me at all. At the same time I discovered that these human beings both the children and the adults have an enormous capacity to love and to grow, but they let so many fears and prejudices hold them back.

These human beings are really incredible in so many ways. They do wonderful things. They have marvelous creative and inventive minds, but they tend to become slaves to what they create.

For example, the human creatures have created a language of sounds and these sound are called words. It's quite a useful invention, but the words have become boxes which limit. They put too much emphasis on words and their words are a freezing of reality. Thus then tend to put labels on people and then these labels keep them from seeing an individual as a total person. If a person is labeled a "Communist" or "radical" or "conservative" then all sorts of limits are placed on that individual. They do not see beyond the label. Some of the big human beings place a label on me by calling me an "alien." Evidently an alien is an outsider, someone different and therefore something to be afraid of.

But I loved the children, especially the boy named Elliot. He was so open, so hones and caring and loving--so spontaneous. He wasn't afraid to touch me and hold me. On the other hand the adults I met seemed to be afraid of intimacy. Maybe they're afraid they'll be hurt or rejected. Maybe they're afraid to take the risk of intimacy.

These humans have made big advancements in their own technology. I understand they have satellites orbiting the earth. They've landed on the moon and they have produced weapons which can destroy their own planet earth. But they seem to have the most difficulty living together in harmony for seven straight days without wanting to strangle each other.

If we can only be of help to them in experiencing the power of universal love. If we can help them turn and become like children, then they will experience and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.