

SUNDAY WORSHIP CUCC
SERMON -- "LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES"

JUNE 25, 2017

Molly Stuart

Pastor Rebecca gave me several options for the scripture reading this morning. I read the first three and then came to Paul writing to the Romans, Chapter 6, Verses 1-11. I must confess I was put off by it and thought to myself: "I'll never use that – way, way too much sin." Sin is a funny word which conjures up different meanings depending on what one's religious tradition was as a child.

I was baptized in the Presbyterian Church but grew up and was confirmed in our community Congregational Church. I don't remember that we talked much about sin. I came away believing people were fundamentally good. And I never could buy into the concept of original sin. Yup, none of that for me.

Then, by the grace of God, it came to me to substitute a contemporary, vernacular word for sin. The word? EGO. And when I re-read the scripture I was overwhelmed by the Good News Paul was conveying to the Romans and to us. EGO – used by so many writers today to describe those in fear, those seeking power, those seeking control, those in judgment, those whose arrogance causes them to ignore or not see the needy, the sick, or the poor in the world...or, indeed, their neighbor.

I realized when using the word ego rather than sin, that Paul was speaking of transformation through the dying of our “false self” or ego to become one with Christ in compassion and love. And that transformation is available to us all. How wonderful! Listen:

“And we know that our old being [ego being] has been put to death with Christ on his cross in order that the power of the sinful [ego] self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin [the ego]....In the same way you are to think of yourselves as dead so far as sin [ego] is concerned but living in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.”

What a wonderful, beautiful passage!!!

There is one catch, of course....it's not easy to let go of the ego. Not easy for me at any rate. I got to thinking about what helps me remember who I am in God, in Christ. What inspires me and draws me to my heart's space where the ego seems not to be present. The space where my actions are pure. And, then it hit me...the movies!!!

So, on this summer morning I am going to share with you four movies that totally inspire me...and illustrate Paul's message. And I am going to recommend strongly that you see them if you have not already.

How many of you have seen Disney's marvelous animated film, “Frozen”? This is the story of two sisters who are princesses. Elsa, the older, at the death of her parents becomes Queen

Elsa. Elsa has a gift, a gift she thinks of as a “flaw” because she does not know how to use the power of the gift. When she moves into fear or anger the gift goes spinning out-of-control and harms others including her younger sister whom she loves. In response, she runs away only to be pursued by her younger sister, Anna. How does the film end? I will only tell you that Queen Elsa experiences a transformation through an act of love, and the gift becomes true and beautiful. Children get it! They love the film and the characters without ever understanding that what they are watching is Paul’s message. I love it, too, and watch it whenever I need a lift.

The second movie is another for children and adults like me. Nanny McPhee. Anybody seen that one? Nanny McPhee appears when children in families are out-of-control. In the first Nanny McPhee movie the father is a widower. The second movie takes place during WWII when the father is away and the mother is trying to hold onto the farm. Nanny McPhee appears dumpy, a tooth over-riding her lip, a huge wart on her chin, and one eyebrow across her face. Her use of her magic stick slowly teaches the five children lessons: To stop fighting, to share nicely, to help each other, to be brave, and to have faith. Sound like great lessons for us all!

As they learn each lesson, one of Nanny McPhee’s ugly features disappears. Her transformation into a lovely woman mirrors the children’s transformation. Emma Thompson portrays

Nanny McPhee in this warm and laugh-out-loud story. Oh yes! Maggie Smith is in the film as well. Delightful and zany.

My third film is an adult one. It was released in 2016 and is titled, “Collateral Beauty” starring Will Smith with Helen Mirren and Kate Winslet among others. Anyone seen it?

The story in brief. A bright, successful man, Will Smith’s character has lost his six-year-old daughter to a rare form of brain cancer. He struggles with the grief but, even after two years, cannot function in the world. He is angry with death who took the child away, with time who stole her too early and with love that has betrayed him. Lost in the ego of despair, anger, resentment and self-preoccupation he puts his business partners (who are also his friends) at great risk. This film portrays not only the transformation of the father but also of each of his friends who have ego issues of their own. I won’t tell you how it all occurs, although I will tell you compassion is key. It is a must-see movie.

Last, but not least, is the true story titled “Hidden Figures,” just released this year. This movie tells the story of negro (as they were called then) women who worked at NASA in the 1960s doing mathematical calculations. Three of the women stood out as exceptional by any and all standards: Katherine Johnson, genius at mathematics and problem-solving; Dorothy Vaughn, a computer whiz when the whites around her did not have a clue how to use the huge, new IBM computer taking up a very

large room; and Mary Jackson who was determined to become an engineer.

The movie portrays all the discrimination and segregation these women faced every day vividly. It is remarkable that they persevered in that environment...but for them it was employment no matter how degrading their treatment was. Their transformation from untouchables to critical members of NASA's launch and return of John Glenn's flight in space is powerful. It appears doubtful that Glenn would have made it back were it not for Katherine Johnson.

But, to me, even more powerful is the transformation of those working (mostly white men along with some white women) at NASA from prejudicial, dismissive, disrespectful of and to the negro women in blatant terms to real recognition and inclusivity of them as critical members of the team in that setting. (note how long it has taken to recognize them beyond that limited environment and they were surely not accepted socially). Kevin Costner does a great job as the "man in charge." I will not share the contrast from the beginning and the end but suffice it to know that NASA named a building after Katherine Johnson. Dorothy Vaughn, the computer superstar, became a supervisor of 30 in the IBM lab, and Mary Jackson became an engineer teaching at Langley.

I like to think Paul would have loved these movies for their message. I love them for that and the inspiration they bring to me to recall who I am in God and in Christ, and to act

accordingly. So how about some summer homework? Four fantastic movies coming to you straight from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Frozen", "Nanny McPhee", "Collateral Beauty", and "Hidden Figures". Get them on Netflix, Amazon, or at Red Box in City Market! Let's all go to the movies. Amen.