

## “Monsters Inc.: Fear and Love in Monstropolis”

1 John 4: 7-21

This is probably one of the films that I have been looking most forward to in this series. The creativity, the relatable characters... I mean... who can go wrong with John Goodman and Billy Crystal as the voices extraordinaire of the two main characters. The first time I saw Monsters Inc., I was blown away and with this film, became a Pixar movie fan.

There is so much that we can talk about when it comes to the various themes of this film...the uncomfortable struggle that change often brings, the hard part of letting go of something known and safe so that new life can spring forth, the uplifting moment acceptance and grace brings into our hearts and of course, the world defining viewpoint fear often creates when we let it be the only voice which guides our actions and our words.

I have to say, God has a funny sense of timing. Usually on this Sunday, after General Assembly, our delegates give a report, sharing a little bit about their experience and what they learned, bringing back a little bit of General Assembly for all of us so that we can all feel connected to the wider church at hand. But this year, God had a different idea. Okay, really, if I am being honest, it was bad

planning on my part. I didn't put two and two together when I was mapping out this series.

But instead of saying that, I'm going to take this opportunity to think differently. I'm going to remember that sometimes, God takes our bad planning and uses it in ways we could never imagine, creating new opportunities for the holy to intersect with our lives in surprising and life giving ways.

So without further ado...let's watch a little bit of Monsters Inc.

As you can see, Monstropolis runs on fear. Each and every night, children's screams are collected so that the good citizens of that city have enough power to operate their everyday lives. However, there are rumors going around that there is a scarcity of resources. The people at the plant where Mike and Scully work are filled with worry. Will it be shut down? What will happen next? How will the people live each day if there is not enough to go around? How will their world change if fear is not the driving force behind it?

Of course, all of this changes when a little child enters the Monster World, a little child who encounters Mike and Scully, teaching them that there is a different way to be, a different way to live, a different way to operate. She shows them how to experience a more powerful way, this time through laughter, this time through

love, this time by radically altering how they view each other and how they view their world.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? That's the whole premise of our faith story. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us...From his fullness, we experience grace upon grace." As people of faith, we know there is a different way to be, a different way to live. Each and every day, we know that our lives are fueled by God's love, a love that transforms us, a love that breaks down barriers, a love that reminds us time and time again, that because God first loved us, we have the joy of knowing we are Beloved Children of God.

But our faith story doesn't stop there. It goes on to say that this transforming love of God's opens our eyes to see things differently, to also see others as Beloved Children of God, as ones made in the image of our God. Our faith story points us beyond the "just me and Jesus" mindset to show us that we are called to be in relationship with one another. That no matter how messy, how difficult, how frustrating, we are called to be in relationship with one another, to be in community with one another as the one true Body of Christ. This coming together as one in love is what makes our faith relevant today. It is what shows the true transformational power of God's love in our world, bringing healing and wholeness to where there was none.

So it should be no surprise that our text goes on to tell us that, “Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters,<sup>[c]</sup> are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister<sup>[d]</sup> whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.<sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters<sup>[e]</sup> also.”

I almost wish the author of John had added, “No ifs and or buts” at this point in his text. Because, there it is in black and white. There are no grey areas. We can’t argue our way of it. “Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters.” For us, as people of faith, our story doesn’t stop with God just loving us. It goes on to challenge us, to transform us, to show us a different way as we come together, showing the rest of the world just how God’s love can and does drive out all fear.

Or let me say it this way...All last week, John, Shirley and I had opportunities to listen to amazing preachers, go to informative workshops, to engage in various conversations around the theme of One. We had the opportunity to explore, to question, to claim the things that make us one in the Body of Christ. But for me, the biggest teaching moment of the week came for me on Saturday when General Assembly opened. As I walked into the convention center, ready to register, I discovered that our General Assembly was sharing space with PopCon. For those who don’t know what this is, it is a convention for those who like sci-fi,

comic books, computer games or a combination of all three. I have to admit I was a little taken aback when I first walked in to the convention center. I thought maybe I had taken a wrong turn somewhere. I found myself in the midst of people, all in costume...costumes from Star Wars, Super Heroes, and characters that I didn't even know, all gathered together for their convention, gathered to share stories, to make new relationships, all gathered together to celebrate their common interests. There I was, standing in the Indianapolis Convention Center in capris and flip flops, wondering what universe I had just entered, only to realize that the gamers were thinking the same thing about us church people. They were wondering what kind of people would actually gather together for a week long church. Who were these people in costume...suits and fancy dresses, people wearing t-shirts that proclaimed All Are Welcome, people sporting various apparel featuring a big red cup with a white x on it. Who were these people wearing large name tags, who were excited to worship together as one?

All of sudden, each group felt like their space had been invaded. Fear of the other, fear of the unknown, fear of dare I say it...judgment on both sides begin to enter into that sacred space. But as the weekend progressed and each group began interacting with each other, that fear went away. I kept hearing comments from both the people attending General Assembly and the people attending POPCon, that went something like this..."You are definitely not what we expected. We

thought you were going to be....fill the blank, judgmental, weird, snobby, socially awkward but in reality, we are just the same. A bunch of nerds coming together, realizing that there is a different way of being together in community.

Now, please don't hear me say that by the time General Assembly was over, we had it all figured out. But I will say that after spending a week with the text of John 17, where Jesus prays for his disciples, where Jesus prays for the world that they may be one, and after spending time with this text from first John, where we realize that we are one in love, I have come to realize that we cannot truly become the Body of Christ here on Earth until God's love becomes the greatest force in our world, greater than all our fears, greater than what all separates us, greater than all our worries and concerns about those supposed "others". If we are truly to become one in the Body of Christ, God's love must be what guides our words and our actions, not fear.

Because unfortunately, in our world culture, a culture that operates in fear, a culture that needs fear to power its devices, a culture that has chosen fear as its mode of operation, too often, we allow fear to dominate our lives. We ignore the life giving power of love and instead, choose to live in fear. This becomes the story we tell, this becomes the story we share. We forget the transformative power of love and by doing so, begin to expect the worse from each other, to expect the worse in others.

When fear becomes our mode of operation, no longer are we able to see each other as Beloved Children of God. Instead rather, we get caught in this world's zero sum game. We begin to believe that there is not enough....not enough love, not enough grace, not enough space for all to be welcome and invited to the Table. Through fear, we begin to ignore what the author of John tells us and we stop our faith story with just God loving me, with God just loving the people who think like me and act like me.

When fear becomes our mode of operation, we lose our connection to the transformative power of God's love to bring people together, male and female, black and white, monsters and children, bringing all people together as one. As people of faith, too many times, we chose fear as the force that powers our daily lives and in doing so, we forget the very premise of our faith story, a story that tells us, that shows how the World become flesh, came to live among us, and to show us a different way of fueling our lives.

Now I'm not going to give the ending of the movie away. We will be watching the rest on Tuesday night if you wish to know how the movie ends. But I will say, I can't help but think that maybe just maybe the creators of Monsters Inc had a copy of 1 John with them as they were developing this movie. Because in the end, through love and laughter transformation happens for all of Monstropolis. In

the end, perfect love drives out fear and all are made one. May it be so for us as well. Amen.