

Toy Story: You've Got a Friend in Me

Ephesians 1: 3-14

This week, we conclude our summer series, The Gospel According to Pixar. It is my hope that this series has opened our eyes to the many ways in which God uses the ordinary to help us experience the extraordinary holiness that surrounds us each and every day...sometimes even using characters in animated movies to do so.

I realize that after watching these movies and talking about them over the last few weeks, many of you may be wondering “What about Toy Story? How can we have a series about the Gospel according to Pixar and not talk about the movie, Toy Story?”

Have no fear! Today is Toy Story, the movie that started it all over 20 years ago, a story about a young boy and his love for his toys, a story that is as timeless as our own faith story. Today we conclude our summer series with a story which tells us how love can bring about life-giving transformations when we let it lead the way.

So without further ado...let's watch a little bit of Toy Story.

I have to say, even though I am showing my age here, I can still remember when this film came out in the theaters. I was in college and was back home for

Christmas Break. One night, Dad decided that we would all go to the movies after we had had a little too much family togetherness. Now, the problem wasn't the going to the movies. The problem was deciding on which movie to go. I can't remember how it was decided, but it was decided that we would all go see Toy Story together as a family.

I'll be honest, this was not the movie I wanted to see. I think my sister and I wanted to go see the latest chick flick but no...there we were, 18 and 20 years old, sitting in a movie theater with our parents, how embarrassing, and to top it all off, we were watching a kid's movie. I thought I would shrivel up and die from it all.

But then the movie started. I can remember becoming so engrossed in the film, worrying about the characters as if they were my closest friends. Toy Story's themes, the questioning of our identities, the facing of our struggles as we try to find our place in the world, the naming of the worrying which happens to all of us when we think we can be so easily replaced, all of these themes hit home for this particular freshmen in college. But it was this movie's main theme of love and friendship which truly captured my heart. I watched as this group of misfit characters realized that just because someone new may come along, this doesn't mean a person's love for them diminishes or goes away. In fact, it does the complete opposite. The love and friendship increases. It multiplies, bringing the group closer together in all their relationships. As I sat mesmerized by this film, it

reminded me that the greatest gift love and friendship can give to us is that they invite everyone, everyone from space rangers to cowboys, to find their space, to find their place in the wider community. Nothing will be reduced. Nothing is taken away. Instead, the love and friendships found within the community, a community of supposed insiders and outsiders, the love and friendships found there makes the community whole, makes it complete.

Very much like how Paul describes love and friendship's life giving power in our Scripture today. If we look at our text, we realize that Paul is very clear about our call to unity, that it is our unity based on the gift of God's grace which brings meaning to our faith. In verse 10, Paul tells this group of misfits, a community which includes supposed insiders and outsiders, Paul tells them that everything has been brought together and summed up in Christ. Everything in heaven and everything on the planet earth...all together as one in Christ. No one is left out. Nothing is reduced because someone new enters into the circle of love and grace. There is more than enough to go around, calling this community of faith to embrace each other as friends in Christ.

Paul then goes on to say that it is in Christ that we discover who we are called to be as Jesus' followers...a people of love, a people of grace, and that God has marked us with the promise of the Holy Spirit so that we will take these gifts...these gifts of love, these gifts of friendship and share them with others.

Now if that is not a call to community, I don't know what is...

Paul reminds the group at Ephesus, and reminds us again today that as people of faith, we know who we belong to... We are God's very own and that God's love is big enough for all of us.

And that once we realize this with both our minds and our hearts, everything changes. The way we see others changes. The way we interact with others changes. The way we live our lives changes. No longer are we in competition with each other. Now, as a whole community, we are connected in Christ. Now we are friends in Christ. Now we have a common purpose, a common goal... that goal being to love all of God's children, not just the ones who look like us or think like us but all of God's children in the same way as God has loved us.

It has been interesting to witness how the tone of our world has evolved since this movie's release 20 years ago. So much has happened to change how we view other people. As someone said to me earlier this week, "Things aren't like they used to be. No one lives in community anymore. No one cares for their neighbor anymore."

At that time, I agreed with this person. I agreed because I was only paying attention to the larger narrative which this world wants us to believe is true. So lost in fear and worry that we begin believe there is only way to be, living out a

narrative that tells us it is better to separate and divide, living out a narrative that tells us we are better off on our own, living out a narrative that tells us there is not enough to go around, so we need to get ours before someone takes it away from us.

I agreed with this person, giving in to this larger harmful, hurt filled narrative until a funny thing happened. On Monday night, we had our monthly community dinner, nothing too out of the ordinary. Just a few people coming together, to snap beans, chop veggies, and cut up some cantaloupe. This group of misfit characters set the table, made sure the buffet line was in order and then issued an invitation, for all to come and eat.

Soon in that place, the welcome became wide. Young and old, rich and poor, supposed insiders and outsiders, all coming together in friendship and in love, all sitting together, breaking bread with one another, all together as a community made whole.

As I watched this scene play out in our fellowship hall on Monday night, watched as neighbors talked and laughed with one another, watched as the forgotten in our midst came to the table embraced as beloved children of God, watched as plate after plate nourished the hungry bellies and hungry spirits, as I watched this scene of welcome come to life right here in our midst, I couldn't help

but hear a voice, saying to all who were gather there, “You’ve Got a Friend in Me.” May it be so. Amen.