

At the Movies: 1. From Broken to Whole (Beauty and the Beast)
2 Corinthians 5:14-17; 1 John 3:14, 16-18
July 1, 2018
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Let's go to the movies! Movies resonate with us because they speak to our human condition and help us see a truth about ourselves and our world. And the most satisfying movies are the ones that end with some resolution or redemption. For the next three weeks, we will use the message of a movie and the message of scripture to see our human condition and the redemption that is possible for us. My hope is that you will not be able to see these movies again without thinking about the message of scripture.

Today, we begin with *Beauty and the Beast*. As the songs says, it is "a tale as old as time" that historians have traced back 4000 years, retold for generations until it was published in 1740. A year ago, it became a live-action movie, the second highest grossing movie of 2017. If you know the story, it shows us the power that love has to transform us. We begin with the movie's opening scene where we meet a self-center prince who is turned into a beast. [video clip #1]

Who could learn to love a beast? The prince is a man who is focused on himself. He is cruel, unkind, and not at all compassionate. There is a beast within him, and his punishment for being so cruel is to take what is inside and let it be seen by others on the outside. He's transformed into a beast. And we know the beast, don't we? He's in every bully who picks on others, in every mean girl who makes others feel inadequate. But we've also seen the beast when we've looked in the mirror. There is something of the beast inside every one of us. We've all said unkind things, done things that hurt others. We can get so focused on ourselves that we fail to see what's happening to others. We know the beast. The question is can the beast be transformed?

In our story, there is another character named Gaston. He's a soldier who has returned to the village and is the heartthrob of all the young women. But the interesting thing about Gaston is that he looks good on the outside but he's in the process of being transformed into a beast. Take a look. [video clip #2]

We call this a narcissist. Narcissus was a figure in Greek mythology who saw his own reflection in the water and fell in love with it, not realizing it was merely an image. Unable to leave the beauty of his reflection, he stared at his reflection until he died. There is such a thing as a healthy love of self, but a narcissist says, "It's all about me." I'm all that matters. And to a certain extent we all struggle with this. When someone invades our space or seems to receive what we deserve. It's mine. It's all about me. All of us have the beast within us. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul says we are all broken and in need of healing. And he provides this list of who needs God's grace: **They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers. God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents, they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.** (Romans 1:29-31) That just about covers all of us – and if you think it doesn't, by 3:23 Paul says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all need what only God can provide.

So, let's meet the heroine of the story. Her name is Belle. She lives with her father, a gentle and kind man who is a clockmaker. The villagers look at Belle with suspicion because she reads books which is not what young women do in the 17th century. But there is one person who is

drawn to her – Gaston. The way he sees it: If Belle is the most beautiful woman, it's obvious she should marry the most beautiful man. [video #3]

Belle's father travels to another village to sell clocks, and before he leaves he asks if there is anything he could bring Belle when he returns. She says, "A rose." As he travels, he gets lost in woods and comes to a large castle that seems deserted but he discovers it is enchanted. The furniture and other objects come to life and even talk. This is the beast's castle, and when the spell turned the prince into the beast, it turned the servants into these objects. He is frightened by what he sees and he flees from the castle and sees a rose which is what Belle wants. He picks the rose, but the beast is watching. The beast is infuriated that someone would steal a rose, and he throws Belle's father into the dungeon. In this scene, Belle has come to rescue her father. What we see is a picture of sacrificial love. [video #4]

Isn't that what Jesus does for us? With his death on the cross, Jesus took our place. There are moments when we have done something that we cannot fix. And Jesus says, I fixed it for you. You can't make it right, but I did it for you so you could have grace. You get a second chance. Belle trades places. And in this act, we see Belle's love for her father. In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." The beast has never seen anything like this – and it begins to change him. The power of love changes us.

Belle escapes from the castle, and a pack of wolves attack her, but the beast rescues her. There's a change within him. This narcissist, cruel prince is willing to lay down his life for Belle. What he saw in her changes him. That's our scripture, this morning: **For Christ's love compels us... He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.** (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) The beast is being transformed, and Belle begins to see in the beast something new, and they are drawn together. They both find love. [video #5]

Fast forward to the end of the movie, Gaston has discovered there is a beast, and he brings a mob with him to kill the beast. But Belle arrives to save the beast. We see an epic battle between good and evil. The beast grabs Gaston and could kill him, but the beast has changed and releases Gaston, and instead leaps across the palace to Belle. Gaston only appears to be good, he has transformed into a beast, and he picks up a gun and shoots the beast in the back, killing him. Belle runs to him and seeing his lifeless body, she cries out her love for him, and this breaks the power of the curse. Take a look. [video #6] And like any good story, they kiss, the music swells, and they live happily ever after.

This is the story of the power of a love that can transform lives. The Greek word for that is *agape* – a love that can overcome death itself. **If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!** (2 Corinthians 5:17) The Prince at the end of the story looks like the Prince at the beginning, but he has become a very different person. It's the power of a love to transform us. That's the love we see in Jesus Christ, and a love that we feel and experience whenever we love and are loved. Here's what John tells us: **Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8) Two thousand years ago, Jesus began a movement, the greatest movement in all history grounded in the unconditional love of God.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a 20th century French Jesuit priest, wrote that the discovery of fire was one of the greatest scientific discoveries in all of history. Fire made civilization possible. It's how we cook food and sanitize our cooking utensils. Without fire to heat our homes, no one would ever live in Minnesota. Fire can melt rock into iron and sand into glass. It's what makes the internal combustion engine possible that brought most of us here this morning. I cannot

imagine a single day without fire and what fire makes possible. De Chardin said fire is one of the great discoveries in human history, and then he said if humanity ever captures the power of love – if we will let the love of God found in Jesus Christ live within us, it will be the second time in history that we have discovered fire. Love. The power of love can change your life.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 1, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Holy God, orient our hearts to expect beautiful things from our meeting with you today. Allow us to lay aside distractions so that you alone may be our focus. Thank you for how you will change us through the power of your love made known to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday, July 2

Scripture: Mark 4:35-5:9

Later that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." They left the crowd and took him in the boat just as he was. Other boats followed along. Gale-force winds arose, and waves crashed against the boat so that the boat was swamped. But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow. They woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we're drowning?" He got up and gave orders to the wind, and he said to the lake, "Silence! Be still!" The wind settled down and there was a great calm. Jesus asked them, "Why are you frightened? Don't you have faith yet?" Overcome with awe, they said to each other, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the lake, to the region of the Gerasenes. As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out of the tombs. This man lived among the tombs, and no one was ever strong enough to restrain him, even with a chain. He had been secured many times with leg irons and chains, but he broke the chains and smashed the leg irons. No one was tough enough to control him. Night and day in the tombs and the hills, he would howl and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from far away, he ran and knelt before him, shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" He said this because Jesus had already commanded him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man!" Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He responded, "Legion is my name, because we are many."

Observation: In *Beauty and the Beast*, the young prince's arrogant, cruel choices brought about his accursed existence. Mark didn't explain what made the man in this story the way he was. He just portrayed a man who lived on "the other side" of the lake—Gentile territory. And the man lived, literally, like a beast—terrifyingly strong, unstable, isolated "among the tombs," where "he would howl and cut himself with stones."

Application: This man lived in an area most Hebrews found alien and frightening—"the other side of the lake" was kind of their equivalent of our "the other side of the tracks." Landing there, the first person they met was frightening and disturbing. Jesus did not condemn the man for his condition—he simply healed him. What enabled Jesus not to be afraid of the place or the person? How did Jesus' calm, confident bearing shape this whole scene, and open possibilities the disciples might have missed for the man's life to change?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when you met a man from whom everyone else wanted to run away, you cared, and you healed. Thank you for being willing to care about and heal the parts of me that frighten even me, too. Amen.

Tuesday, July 3

Scripture: Mark 5:10-20

They pleaded with Jesus not to send them out of that region. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside. "Send us into the pigs!" they begged. "Let us go into the pigs!" Jesus gave them permission, so the unclean spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of about two thousand pigs rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned. Those who tended the pigs ran away and told the story in the city and in the countryside. People came to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to be demon-possessed. They saw the very man who had been filled with many demons sitting there fully dressed and completely sane, and they were filled with awe. Those who had actually seen what had happened to the demon-possessed man told the others about the pigs. Then they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. While he was climbing into the boat, the one who had been demon-possessed pleaded with Jesus to let him come along as one of his disciples. But Jesus wouldn't allow it. "Go home to your own people," Jesus said, "and tell them what the Lord has done for you and how he has shown you mercy." The man went away and began to proclaim in the Ten Cities all that Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Observation: Belle, the heroine of *Beauty and the Beast*, had to learn to look more deeply than just the Beast's fearsome exterior. Jesus' love and power restored the "completely sane" man who had been there all along under the broken chains and frightening howls. Jesus' ability to see the possibilities in the hurting person created the setting for change, and made space for love to do its healing, restoring work.

Application: Psychologists have observed that even positive change can make us nervous, and sometimes depressed. As the villagers in *Beauty and the Beast* sing, "We don't like what we don't understand." It makes a sad kind of sense that it bothered the townspeople when they saw the formerly fearsome man dressed and calm. What positive change would you like to see in your life? Are there fears making it hard for you to move toward changing?

Prayer: Jesus, if I'm comfortable when I shouldn't be, please disturb my life. And give me the courage to work with you to make the positive changes I long to see happen. Amen.

Wednesday, July 4

Scripture: John 3:17-21

God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him isn't judged; whoever doesn't believe in him is already judged, because they don't believe in the name of God's only Son. "This is the basis for judgment: The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil. All who do wicked things hate the light and don't come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. Whoever does the truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God."

Observation: Ironically, in the movie the Beast's ugly exterior concealed a man yearning to be free from his curse, while Gaston's handsome face hid a truly monstrous, hate-filled soul. Jesus' striking words to the Hebrew leader Nicodemus (which followed the famous John 3:16 passage) said that God does not arbitrarily judge human beings. Rather, like Gaston, we condemn ourselves as our choices show that we love darkness more than light.

Application: What sources (from parents and other childhood teachers to popular films or books) have tended to give you a picture of God as scrutinizing every little thing you do, looking for something wrong to condemn? How can Jesus' description of his life purpose in verse 17 reshape some of those mental images you may carry about how God looks at you? How can it reshape the way you relate to others you think may be on a wrong life course?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be the light in my life, showing me where I need to grow, and shining out from me to uplift and encourage others. Amen.

Thursday, July 5

Scripture: Acts 26:9-19

"I really thought that I ought to oppose the name of Jesus the Nazarene in every way possible. And that's exactly what I did in Jerusalem. I locked up many of God's holy people in prison under the authority of the chief priests. When they were condemned to death, I voted against them. In one synagogue after another—indeed, in all the synagogues—I would often torture them, compelling them to slander God. My rage bordered on the hysterical as I pursued them, even to foreign cities. "On one such journey, I was going to Damascus with the full authority of the chief priests. While on the road at midday, King Agrippa, I saw a light from heaven shining around me and my traveling companions. That light was brighter than the sun. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice that said to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me? It's hard for you to kick against a spear.' Then I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, whom you are harassing. Get up! Stand on your feet! I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you as my servant and witness of what you have seen and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes. Then they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, and receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are made holy by faith in me.' "So, King Agrippa, I wasn't disobedient to that heavenly vision.

Observation: At one point the Beast sadly said, "It's no use. She's so beautiful, and I'm...well, look at me!" And Mrs. Potts replied, hopefully, "Must help her to see past all that." As the apostle Paul described his spiritual journey to King Agrippa, he painted a similar picture. When he looked at Jesus and his followers, at first he saw only a terrible threat to the faith heritage that he treasured. But then Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, and Paul "saw past all that" to the glory of the Savior. He accepted Jesus' call on his life, and never looked back.

Application: Paul seemed to make a full 180 degree turn, from persecuting Christians to planting churches. He began using his Roman name Paul rather than the Hebrew name Saul. But at his core, Paul didn't actually change. He kept following the God of Israel with all-out zeal the whole time. It was just that now God had showed him the right way to serve! What is most central in shaping your life—your vision or God's vision?

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you that you have a heavenly vision for my life, and for the world around me. Help me to have the faith and courage to obey that vision. Amen.

Friday, July 6

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for

themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised. So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"

Observation: When Belle came to the castle, the servants (cursed to be a candlestick, mantle clock and teapot) could only wonder if she might be "the one" who would break the spell. After meeting Jesus, the apostle Paul had no doubt Jesus was "the one" who could set the human family free from our self-imposed alienation from God. The good news, he said, is that God loves us, has always wanted to reconcile us, and acted in Christ to bring that about. As we become a "new creation" in Christ, God makes it our mission to invite others to "be reconciled to God."

Application: Most Roman, Greek and Canaanite religions offered gifts and sacrifices to try to reconcile their angry, displeased god or gods to them. But Paul said that was backward. We were the alienated ones. God came in Jesus to draw us back into the circle of heaven's love. Are you reconciled with God? Are you open for God to work through you to reconcile others – sharing the good news of freedom in Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thanks to you I experience more restored harmony in my life and relationships. Help me share your message of reconciliation with a friend, neighbor, or loved one today. Amen.

Saturday, July 7

Scripture: Romans 12:1-3, 9-21

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature. Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you.

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord. Instead, If your enemy is hungry, feed

him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Observation: In *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beast demonstrated love for Belle first by letting her go from the castle to rescue her father. Then Belle expressed her love for the Beast in the nick of time, and all ended well. The apostle Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote this letter. But many of his friends had, and he knew that Christians there, as in every other church he worked with, faced many real-life tensions and challenges. He offered powerful, practical wisdom to guide, not only the Roman Christians but Christ-followers through the centuries, in how to transform from “beasts” to people of love, living lives that can defeat evil with good.

Application: We sometimes compartmentalize our faith and treat it as something separate from the rest of our lives – i.e., something we do on a Sunday rather than a way of living. How would the transforming of your mind Paul envisioned affect business dealings? Political behavior? Activities like sports or movie-going? Paul wrote in verse 9, “Love should be shown without pretending.” Have you ever been in a setting where everyone pretended to love one another, while whispered conversations were full of criticism and backbiting? What makes honest love (which includes dealing honestly with issues that arise) so vital to spiritual health and transformation?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want my life to count for good, to make this world a better place. Plant the principles Paul taught in my heart. Help me not just read them but enthusiastically live them every day. Amen.