

The Fifth Sunday in Lent  
April 2, 2017  
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Hebrews 5:7-9** During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

**"Tame the Beast"**

Maybe I'll stop talking about it soon. But I've been pretty excited about a new movie that just came out in theaters. Well, one screen on one theater in Farmington last week anyway. And I'm not the only one. One of the writers from the WELS magazine, Forward in Christ, called to talk about our reactions and how our congregation is using it to engage with our community. So it could be some positive press for Christ the Rock. But more than that, I'm excited to see how the Holy Spirit can use the Luther movie to get people thinking about some real spiritual issues and start some conversations about important matters of the soul. I pray we have opportunities to keep discussing the importance of the Bible and God's amazing grace with some of those movie-goers.

But it appears I'm in the minority. Do you know what is already the top grossing Hollywood movie of 2017? Yep, it's Beauty and the Beast. Some of you remember it when it was just a cartoon movie. Some of you knew the story before Disney decided to do their magic with it. Maybe just hearing the title of the movie gets this little ear worm going "Tale as old as time; tune as old as song.." There is truth in those lyrics. It is a timeless tale. It is a story that still resonates with audiences today because of the power of the story. Even if it's already been told and the movie has already been made, we are captivated by this story of evil and ugliness undone by beauty. Not just beauty of pretty faces and extravagant dresses and impressive palaces. But the beauty of someone willing to look beneath the surface and show love to someone trapped in all sorts of ugliness. And the beauty of that love that brings a change in that cold, hard heart. Love that can change a person on the inside and on the outside.

And for that reason, there's a lot of similarity between a low-budget documentary about the life and faith of Martin Luther and this big-budget fairy tale. Because neither movie shows us ultimate love in quite the vivid ways as we see in the Book of Hebrews. Without costumes, sets, or computer generated animation, Hebrews chapter five shows us the beauty of a Savior. We see Jesus coming to us in our ugliness, breaking our cold hearts, and freeing us to see true beauty in God's glory. We see Jesus tame the beast.

The Letter to the Hebrews has one main goal: see Jesus in a new way. Hebrews was written to people who knew the Old Testament, who were familiar with Moses and Abraham and King David. People who had been immersed in the Old Testament laws and ceremonies. And all of that had been such a part of them, their very identity. And when they heard about

Jesus, he actually seemed like a disappointment. So the writer to the Hebrews wants to showcase the superiority of Jesus. Jesus doesn't destroy or spit on all that Old Testament heritage, he just fulfills it and exceeds it. So Hebrews shows us that Jesus is superior to angels, superior to Moses, superior to the sacrificial system, superior to the priests who ministered under that sacrificial system.

And yet Jesus has to be relatable to real people. Earlier in Hebrews chapter 5, we see the strength of the priest who ministered at the temple: **"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness."** (Hebrews 5:2) Priests knew what the normal people needed, because they were people too. Jesus can relate to people too. Since Jesus was 100% human, he experienced true humanity. We learn this about him: **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears."** (Hebrews 5:7) Jesus experienced real anguish. Jesus also experienced real suffering: **"he learned obedience from what he suffered."** (Hebrews 5:8) We get a rare glimpse of the inner workings of Jesus. We get to see his struggles. Emotions are packed into these verses. True humanity meant true anguish. He experienced real sufferings. And he had real inner turmoil know that the most severe suffering awaited him on Good Friday.

That's a familiar story for a lot of us. But Hebrews retells it so we can deepen our understanding of his very real struggle flowing from his real humanity. In his struggles, we can marvel at his superiority. Knowing what anguish awaited him: **"he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death."** (Hebrews 5:7) He knew he would have to shoulder the burden of ugliness of all of human sin and pay the price for the evil accumulated in the world. And yet, Jesus remained faithful: **"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."** (Hebrews 5:8) The beauty of Jesus stands out that much more when we have a better appreciation for his human weaknesses.

Kids always love retelling and reenacting their favorite shows and movies. And there is one thing they almost always fight over. Who gets to be the good guy. Who gets to be the hero or the princess. That doesn't really change when we get older. You don't think of yourself as the villain, the one needing rescue or saving. You tend to overlook your own ugliness. But then you experience struggles. Life doesn't go right. You suffer pain and can't function normally. Loved ones hurt and betray you. You get dumped on by co-workers. Nothing seems to go your way.

And then you can't help it. You lash out. Maybe not violently. But with words meant to pierce and injure. Your weaknesses are exposed. Your flaws are obvious. You are ashamed by the ugliness you see in yourself. Those stresses, that anguish breaks you. Not torture at the hands of enemy spy agencies, but the fairly normal and mundane aspects of life cause you to crack. You see yourself through all those beastly behaviors.

That's just part of being a human being not named Jesus. You feel alone. You feel guilty and ashamed of how you handled a tough situation. Sometimes you even turn to the Lord. But when you don't get the answer you want or it seems slow in coming, you retreat. You can't

help feeling abandoned. So you isolate yourself even more. You withdraw from the source of your true identity in Christ and your power source for hope in life.

Here's where we see something surprising about Jesus. He doesn't abandon you in your time of need. He doesn't leave you to fend for yourself. In fact, Jesus never abandons you no matter how you feel. Jesus is there all along. During his time on earth, the days of his human flesh, Jesus experienced real humanity so he can show solidarity with human struggles. Jesus was reduced to intense groans and weeping. Jesus is with you in your suffering no matter how beastly it feels to you.

In the Disney version Belle has to make a choice. She could think of herself first. She could ensure her own safety and freedom. Or she could show undeserved kindness to the Beast who had imprisoned her. The anguish of Jesus highlighted in Hebrews results from knowing what he was about to face. His prayers and supplications, his cries and tears came from knowing the abandonment and pain that lay ahead of him. He honestly and deeply desired to be spared from misery and death. In the Garden of Gethsemane we hear Jesus praying: **"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** (Matthew 26:39) The cup was the betrayal and arrest, the torture and execution. Again he pleaded: **"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."** (Matthew 26:42) Jesus learned ultimate obedience when he put the will of the Father above his own desires, when he placed the salvation of sinners ahead of his own needs.

Jesus made a choice. He chose you. Jesus chose to battle your beast. Jesus chose to overcome your struggles with his own struggles. Jesus chose to wipe away your guilt by his obedience. Jesus chose to overcome your beastly behaviors by his beautiful sacrifice.

The obedience of Jesus does more than give you a chance to transform your heart and change your life. Because of everything Jesus went through, he became your salvation. This is the effect of Jesus' finished work: **"And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."** (Hebrews 5:9) Jesus doesn't just show moral perfection as an example for you to follow. He was made perfect by submitting to the Father's will all the way to suffering and death so he could be your sacrifice. He had your salvation in mind the whole time during his struggles and anguish. We heard this focus in the turbulent days leading up to his death: **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"** (John 12:27,28) God's glory is seen best and most beautifully when souls are snatched from hell. God's name gets glory when any human being is brought into God's kingdom. Jesus' earthly experiences don't just acquaint him with your human experience. They uniquely qualify and prepare him for his ultimate act of sacrifice on behalf of all humanity.

That means you know how your story ends. Your glory comes through Jesus Christ when God's name is glorified. That glory brings hope to your struggles right now. So often you retreat when you feel defeated. You lash out when you feel under attack. The perfect submission of Jesus to the Father takes away your fear. In your tears and your cries, Jesus

has gone through it all for you. In your prayers and supplications, Jesus gives you the ultimate answer. When you come face to face with death, Jesus gives the guarantee of eternal life. In your weakness and vulnerability, Jesus is there with you. In your deepest moments of fear, Jesus is the antidote to the fear feeding the beast inside.

Conclusion:

It's a familiar story. It's been told and retold. Yet there is a reason why it gets redone and repacked over and over again. New audiences can appreciate time-honored tales in a fresh way. It's not just true for Beauty and the Beast. Hebrews encourages God's children to see Jesus in a fresh way. In his humanity, Jesus is your beauty. Jesus shows solidarity with you in your humanity. Jesus poured out his heart to his Father. But ultimately Jesus submitted to the Father's will for you. His obedience through all those struggles overcomes all the ugliness in your heart. Only Jesus could accomplish your salvation. Only Jesus could give you hope for your struggles and anguish that accompany normal human existence. Only Jesus can give you the hope to overcome and persevere in the middle of your sufferings. Only Jesus could tame the beast. Amen.