July 24, 2016

Psalm 103:1-18 (UMH 824-825)

*At the Movies:* Despicable Me

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Psalm 103:1-18 Hymnal 824-825

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

Our movie clip is near the end of the movie. We will see Gru reading a bedtime story that he has written to the three girls that he has adopted.

Movie Clip – Chapter 19

Our movie is about a villain named Gru. Gru is a bad guy who wants to steal the moon. Now why would he want to do such a thing? That is a good question. You learn in Despicable Me that Gru’s mom told him that he wouldn’t amount to anything. As an adult he is so focused on being a villian. And as you watch the movie, you open your heart to Gru. You start to identify with Gru even though he is a bad guy. Because if Gru can just get the next thing around the corner, then he will have peace, then he will be successful and loved. We have felt that too. If we can just get the next big thing in our life, then we will have peace, then we will be successful and loved. We already shared in the Psalm together, where we said the words “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.” In the Common English Bible translation it says, “Like a parent feels compassion for their children—that’s how the Lord feels compassion for those who honor him.”

Gru invites three orphans into his house and they love Gru. They keep loving him and wanting a relationship with him even when he disappoints them. And Gru begins to change from the inside out. He realizes that what he wants most in the world is to have a relationship with his girls.

We are loved by a God who is in relationship in the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We need relationship. For many of us Sunday morning is the only time each week that we get a hug. So, make sure to hug someone this morning!

The focus of this week’s movie is on relationships, but I read an editorial in the Dallas Morning News yesterday by Robert Wilonsky that made me wonder if the lessons we learn today can be applied to so much more. Wilonsky had a conversation with Rev. Zan Holmes about where we go next after the murder of five police officers. Zan was the pastor at St. Luke Community UMC for 28 years and was known for his community activism. In 2001, he was recognized as one of the [Civil Rights Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Rights_Movement)’s “Invisible Giants” in the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute in [Selma, Alabama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selma,_Alabama).[[1]](#footnote-2) So, Wilonsky asked Zan where do we go next? Zan said, “I don’t know.” This is from someone who has been a part of discussions about poverty, race, police, housing, education for a long time. Then Zan said, “The question is: Are we growing through what we are going through? If we don't grow through what we're going through, we will end up having to repeat the same lessons. The challenge even in this event is, will we become a better city that will draw us closer to one another, draw us closer to God? Will we do that? Or will we fail the exam? This is a test.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Dallas is segregated and impoverished and if you have not seen that with your own eyes, I invite you to come paint a house with us this Saturday as we go to the Fair Park area of Dallas when the State Fair of Texas is not running. What else can we do?

I was googling about Zan Holmes and learned about an event that happened his first year in seminary at Perkins School of Theology at SMU. Zan was in his one-room apartment in south Dallas and he heard a car accident, so he rushed to see if he could help. He found a black man bleeding to death on the side of the road. Four white men, two ambulance attendants and a pair of police officers, stood watching. Zan pleaded with them, "Why aren't you helping this man?" They were waiting for a “black ambulance” to take the victim to the hospital where he died. This was in the 1950s.[[3]](#footnote-4) And that was more than 60 years ago. We have come such a long way. But we still have so far to go.

Zan said he looked in the eyes of those white men and he could see the guilt and the shame in their eyes. He could tell that they felt bad about it, but Zan said, “we were all bound by the ugly system of racism. I was just as bound by the system as they were, because they couldn't do anything--and I couldn't do anything either. We were all bound by an evil system.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

As I read that editorial I thought about two things that happened this week. One was just down the road at Genghis Grill where a group of police officers were turned away because an employee told them that their presence may frighten other customers. The officers left without being seated and the employee was later fired.[[5]](#footnote-6) Zan Holmes asked, “Are we growing through what we are going through? If we don't grow through what we're going through, we will end up having to repeat the same lessons. Will we become a better city that will draw us closer to one another, draw us closer to God? Will we do that? Or will we fail the exam? This is a test.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

Then the news about Charles Kinsley, the behavioral therapist who was trying to help an autistic patient he worked with in Miami. Kinsey said he asked the officer why he shot him and the officer responded that he didn’t know.

And around our world the terrorist attacks in Munich and Kabul. Our Psalm reminds us that our days are like grass, they bloom like a flower then the wind passes over and it is gone. It is God’s faithful love that is forever.

We are meant to be in community with all of God’s children. But it is really hard. Last week my son was at a flight camp at Love Field and he was able to see Air Force One land. The teacher sent us a video of Air Force One landing and I received the text as I was walking into the Pet Smart to get dog food for my dog. I thought it was the coolest thing that my son had seen Air Force One that I told the cashier and showed him the video. He then started to talk badly about our President and I didn’t know how to respond. I wish that I would have said something witty like, “Wow, you seem pretty angry, are you okay? Being angry isn’t good for your blood pressure…” Instead, I said something like, “have a good day” and walked away.

As Zan said, “Are we growing through what we are going through? If we don't grow through what we're going through, we will end up having to repeat the same lessons.”

“Like a parent feels compassion for their children—that’s how the Lord feels compassion for those who honor him.” In the church we are in Christian community, we worship beside folks who are different than us. And we have to figure out how to be in relationship with one another. We have to figure out how to open our hearts to others. Because when we do, we will be transformed. Wilonsky ended his editorial with these words from Zan Holmes, “We have failed, and we have succeeded, but nothing stays won. We get to the point where we get satisfied with where we are. That's the great danger. Everything we think we've won we have to win over and over again. We can never — ever — become satisfied.”

So, we stand in solidarity with those who are hurting in our world. We cry out, we weep, we scream. We hopefully begin to change systems of injustice. We covenant together to work for change.[[7]](#footnote-8)

And we grow through what we are going through so we don’t have to repeat the same lessons. We grow in our relationships, in our faith, in our work, in our families, in our lives. We must grow.

Amen.

1. http://www.dallasnews.com/news/headlines/20160720-are-we-growing-through-what-we-are-going-through-what-happens-now-dallas.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.dallasnews.com/news/headlines/20160720-are-we-growing-through-what-we-are-going-through-what-happens-now-dallas.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.blackandchristian.com/articles/pulpit/umns-08-02.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.blackandchristian.com/articles/pulpit/umns-08-02.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://www.wfaa.com/news/local/dallas-cops-refused-service-at-restaurant-genghis-grill-apologizes-fires-employee/277192477 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://www.dallasnews.com/news/headlines/20160720-are-we-growing-through-what-we-are-going-through-what-happens-now-dallas.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. http://www.rebeccadavidhensley.com/2016/07/from-portland-to-orlando-to-baton-rouge.html?m=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)