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Pentecost 4

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, (if you haven't realized it by now, after the many years of ministry here) I have this habit.

And as much as I try, I have not figured out how to break this habit.

Maybe counseling and therapy would help.

Maybe working a 12-step program would help.

Now, mind you, it is not some self-destructive habit.

No, no, nothing like that.

Nor is it a habit that makes you say, "Gross" or "That's repulsive."

But it is true that whenever my habit does in fact reveal itself, my poor wife Kathy just cringes, not so much in embarrassment as in exasperation, as if to say, "There he goes again."

So, what if this habit of which I speak?

Well, I tend to find, or at least think I find, and then proceed to point out Christian imagery in movies.

Yes, I will be there watching a movie and suddenly I find myself saying things to my wife or kids, or to some unsuspecting friend, "Oh, did you catch that image of the resurrection there?"

Or, after the movie is over, I might say, "Did you see how such and such a scene alluded to Jesus's sacrificial death?"

Or, I'll be in a casual conversation about a movie and say something like, "Have you ever noticed the baptismal connection in the use of water in such and such a film?" Whatever film we are discussing at the moment.

Yes, this pointing out of Christian imagery in movies is an annoying habit of mine.

In truth, it is a bit of an occupational hazard with me.

As a pastor, this is just what I do.

I look for the presence of God in the world around me, and even in the movies I watch, and then I annoyingly point it out.

Yes, when watching a movie, any movie, I tend to get caught up in looking for Christian themes and ideas embedded in the film.

And, Kathy likes to tell me that not everything has to be a symbol.

“You know, sometimes a pool of water is just a pool water. It doesn’t necessarily have to relate to baptism.”

But to the contrary, I am convinced that most screenwriters, most movie directors, are bent on using images, even Christian images *ad nauseum*.

Most things, indeed, I believe anyway, have greater meaning than their surface understanding.

PAUSE

And so, take a scene from the movie called *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

There is a scene in that movie where the kid wizard Harry saves a man who has been wrongfully imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit, and who is now facing the destruction of his soul.

Harry frees this man named Sirius Black.

And so, in effect, Harry redeems this man from his horrible fate of imprisonment in a most dreadful prison called Azkaban, which many people believe is a play on the word Alcatraz, and we all know that Alcatraz was a prison for the most awful of criminals.

Harry redeems Sirius Black from this awful prison and from destruction, he saves him from a sentence of which he, Sirius Black, was innocent.

And this redemption is not unlike Jesus freeing us from our own imprisonment to sin and death.

We are all born into sin, and we are all destined to destruction as a consequence, and yet, Jesus redeems us, like the wizard Harry redeems Sirius.

And so, in the movie, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry saves Sirius from his imprisonment and destruction...

And then shortly afterwards, Sirius and Harry are having a conversation.

And at one point in that conversation, Sirius looks into Harry's face, and he says these words, "You look so like your father..."

"You look so like your father..."

Now, on the surface, Sirius is saying that Harry looks like his biological father, whom Harry has hardly known, because Harry's father was killed when Harry was just a small child.

Sirius, on the other hand, had known Harry's father quite well.

In fact, he had been best friends with Harry's father.

So, on the surface, Sirius is just telling Harry that Harry shares a resemblance with his father.

"You look so like your father..."

But, the below-the-surface meaning, the deeper meaning behind that statement...

What the movie narrative, what the storyline is saying is that Harry also shares a resemblance with God the Father.

Why else highlight that phrase in the movie, right?

If we are to understand that phrase, "You look so like your father..." from ONLY that surface interpretation...

If we are only to understand that Harry and his biological father share a resemblance, why bother stating that in the movie in the first place...

Aside being a nice, sentimental moment between Sirius and Harry, that comment doesn't advance the story in any way.

But, but if we understand that phrase, “You look so like your father...” from its deeper interpretation, then that phrase connects the redeeming act of Harry (saving Sirius from his imprisonment and destruction) to the redeeming act of Jesus.

Just as Harry redeems Sirius, so does Jesus redeem us all.

And to be like God the Father, to look like God the Father, is to behave like God the Father in his Son Jesus Christ.

To appear like God is to seek the redemption of others, to seek out the salvation of others, to free others from whatever imprisons or threatens to destroy them.

And what greater compliment, WHAT GREATER COMPLIMENT could one give to another than to say, “YOU look so like your father”?

You are so talented. You are so gifted. You are so smart. You are so athletic. You are so beautiful.

All those compliments pale in comparison to the compliment, “You look so like your father. You look so like your father.”

PAUSE

Now, I bring all this up because our gospel reading today says these words:

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master.”

And Jesus himself will often note that his work—his mission and ministry—is likened to the work of God the Father.

Jesus says, in John 5:19 “The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.”

Furthermore, in John 14:9-10, Jesus says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.... The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

So, Jesus is the visible manifestation of God the Father.

Jesus is absolutely obedient, 100% faithful to the will of God the Father.

Jesus is God incarnate, and so to see Jesus is to see God the Father.

To see Jesus is to see the all-powerful, the almighty God who made heaven and earth.

To see Jesus is to see the creator of the universe embodied in a person.

It is like that line from the Disney movie *Aladdin*, when the Genie describes his immense power contrasted with his confinement to the magical lamp.

The Genie says, "I am phenomenal, cosmic power, contained in an itty bitty living space."

PAUSE

C.S. Lewis, whom we know most famously as the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, picks up on this notion of Jesus doing only what he sees God the Father doing.

In his writing entitled *The Grand Miracle*, Lewis states that what God does on the large scale, Jesus does on the small scale...

Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes, and it is considered a miracle when he feeds 5000 people with just a minimal amount.

But God the Father multiplies grains of wheat in fields which goes to make bread, and God multiplies fish into schools when they spawn in rivers. And this too is miraculous.

And Jesus changes water into wine, and it is considered a miracle at the Wedding at Cana.

But again, God the Father brings water upon the earth and that water is drawn up a grape vines in vineyards, and grapes are produced in abundance with water that becomes grape juice, which when fermented produces wine. And this too is miraculous. God the Father, too, changes water in wine.

Jesus then does on the micro level what God the Father does on the macro level.

When it comes to miracles then, to see Jesus is at work performing a miracle is to be reminded of the same large-scale miracles performed by God the Father, so says C. S. Lewis.

PAUSE

What is my point?

Only this...that we are called to be people who, like Jesus, do the very works of God the Father.

Now, we might argue, that we aren't able to change water into wine.

And we might contend, that we aren't able to multiply loaves and fishes.

But is it no less a miracle, for instance, that within our synod many, many years ago, the ELCA's World Hunger Appeal was started?

It began with a simple appeal in the year 1974 whereby churches were encouraged to collect pennies.

I don't know how much was collected that first year.

But more recent totals are around 20 million dollars a year, which are used to end hunger and poverty around the world.

That is miraculous and it is indeed the multiplying of resources, like bread and fishes.

It is the transformation of our resources into the blessing for others, like changing water into wine.

And in this, it is true that the ELCA looks like God the Father.

Or think about the work of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church which serves a community meal, and makes and distributes 40 plus meals every two weeks to feed people locally.

Or think about the work of Our Saviour to host homeless families, to provide sleeping accommodations, evening meals, and transportation to the Family Promise Day Center, to help families get back on their feet.

By these things, by these ministries, the congregations of St. Stephen and Our Saviour look like God the Father.

For these are ministries which offer mercy and compassion and this is who and what God the Father is about.

Yes, there is no greater compliment than to say, "You look so like your Father."

You look so like your Father in heaven.

PAUSE

Church organizations, congregations, by their work, should look like God the Father. And, praise be to God, when they do.

But it is also true that individuals, like ourselves, we, too, can and should look like God the Father.

Whenever we by grace-filled actions offer mercy and compassion...

...well, then, we, too, are displaying the phenomenal cosmic power, within our itty bitty living space.

Yes, make no mistake about it, mercy and compassion are phenomenal, cosmic power.

By mercy and compassion God created the universe.

By mercy and compassion God redeemed the universe.

By mercy and compassion God continues to care for the universe.

By mercy and compassion God continues to care for you and me, and all people.

Take away mercy and compassion, like taking away gravity, and this universe falls into disorder, indeed falls to pieces.

PAUSE

And so, sisters and brothers in Christ, use well the itty bitty living space entrusted to you.

Be persons of phenomenal cosmic power, by being persons who are compassionate and merciful, and may it be said of you, may it be said of each one of us...

"You look so like your Father."

Thanks be to God. AMEN.