



HOLLYWOOD
United Methodist Church
the **heart** of hollywood

CROSSFLIX SERIES – “TOY STORY 3”

July 24, 2011

Sermon by Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma, Senior Pastor

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 7-13

This morning we continue our Crossflix sermon series in which we look at faith in film. Today we are focusing on Toy Story – the trilogy, but really concentrating on Toy Story 3. How many of you have seen it? Let me say thanks to all of you who brought in a toy for the children at Hope Gardens, the shelter for women and children that is operated by the Union Rescue Mission on skid row. This picture is from our annual Christmas visit to Hope Gardens a few years ago. We know that in the film the donated toys have been loved up, but we wanted to be able to offer something new and fresh to these children who have experienced what no child should ever have to –living in a car, or on the street.

Now, if you didn't have time to pick up a toy before today, don't worry – we'll be collecting them in the office up until Thursday, so feel free to drop one by during the week. And there is no talk back today. Instead we get to greet Woody (put on pulpit) and Buzz (put on pulpit) here during worship!

Like Harry Potter for some of us, my sons -- and their parents -- grew up with Toy Story, which premiered in 1995 when Josh was 2 and James was 5. The toys, which come to life when no humans are in the room, demonstrate raw human emotion – love, jealousy, envy and ultimately loyalty – to each other and to their owner, Andy. And as a result of those emotions, over the years they have gotten in and out of all sorts of trouble, with one common theme that always makes the story complete: their love for Andy and for each other.

This installment of the trilogy finds Andy getting ready to go to college. His mom asks him to sort through his things, deciding what he wants to keep and store in the attic, what he wants to take with him, and what he would like to donate to the local day care center. Andy's toys, which have been with him since he was just a little boy, haven't figured prominently in his life for a while.

But oh, how Andy loved them, as we'll see in this first clip.

I have some very wise friends who warned me not to see this film last summer when it came out, the same time Josh graduated from high school and was preparing for college. So when we decided to have TS 3 in Crossflix because of its powerful messages, I thought ok. It's been a year – I survived Josh being away in Boston for his freshman year; he's still in town another month or so; surely I can watch a Pixar movie.

Oh, please. As soon as I heard "You've Got a Friend in Me," the tears started. But not for the reasons you might think. Yes, the entire trilogy is a reminder for us who are parents that our children grow up far too quickly, and to savor the days with them. But beyond that, the films remind all of us that life itself is never static. Especially #3, *as it deals with the themes of change, growing up, and continually learning where our place in the world is.*¹

The entirety of Paul's letter to the early church at Corinth dealt with the congregation learning to find their own "new normal" as they established themselves as a new community. Because they were blending not just Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, but also cultural and secular norms and expectations, they kept arguing amongst themselves about who was right, who was better; who was more important. Paul writes to them and tells them that as a community, they need to look beyond themselves, beyond their own interests. They need to practice *agape*, the "self-giving love," the unconditional and unwavering love God has for us. This is the love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... the self-giving *agape* love of God that never fails.

And then Paul tells us why, in short hand, they need to grow up. First, he said, we're not children. When we were young, we thought like a child, we reasoned like a child. But then when we became adults, we put away that sort of childish thinking that says I am the center of the universe; that it's all about me. That childish behavior that manifests itself when we argue over who is right – instead of thinking of the right thing to do; when we argue over who has the most toys – instead of taking care of those who have no toys at all; when we stomp our feet and have a tantrum over what we want, instead of being mindful of what others need. Paul says: that's the sort of childish behavior that needs to end and be replaced by thoughtful, responsible adult countenance.

One preacher put it this way: *Jesus said we are to believe like children, not behave like children.* Amen?²

Woody, Buzz and the gang have had their own issues. They've argued over who Andy loved best. They've been hurt by the thought that Andy has grown up and think he doesn't want them anymore... have put their own childish desire to be played with ahead of their primary adult responsibility: taking care of Andy. All but Woody, who Andy tells us is no ordinary toy... Andy says that the thing that makes Woody special is he'll never give up on you... ever.

It is Woody's continual acts of love with his family of toys that causes them to reclaim their primary focus: loving Andy and loving and taking care of one another ... and they attempt to escape the landfill they find themselves in to get home. A word of caution – this is the scariest part of the film, so it's ok to grab the hand of the person next to you.

Darrell Manson-Hollywood Jesus has written: *The toys in the story are facing that existential crisis of wondering what is beyond the life they have known. (The seventy-five cent word for that is eschatology.) I'll admit that I don't think many viewers will leave the theater thinking about the eschatological implication of TS 3, but as producer Darla Anderson notes, Pixar films can be as deep as you want them to be.*³

That's true for all of us, isn't it? We wonder not only about the life to come, but what is next for us in this life. What will be my next job? Will it be here in LA or somewhere else? What's the future of the relationship I am in? Will I have enough savings to retire or will I have to work until I am 80? The only dependable constant we have in life, it seems, is change.

That is why being in relationship with God and with each other is not just important, it's essential. We need to be able to grab one another's hands, embrace each other with God's great love that never ends.

Paul talks about the most excellent way of living is when love transforms us and makes us new beings in Jesus Christ. He wanted the church at Corinth, and Christians today, to create a revolution based in this crazy little thing called love. He knew that when we allow our lives to be filled with the self-giving and radical love of God, we are changed. And the world around us is transformed.

It's not easy. Last week we were subject to name calling by a family who consider themselves a church in Kansas. Several of our congregation members, me and the church, were called names... Just saying – our work is cut out for us. But when we trust in the power of love, we are able, during those times of transition, those times that are uncertain or just plain painful, to hold fast to God's promises.

When we follow the great commandment to love God and each other, we no longer live for ourselves; we live for God. We no longer see other people in the same way; we see others as God sees them – beloved children created in God's good image. And when we fully and unconditionally love others, the arguments over who is right or better will stop. The petty preoccupations of our day to day lives will cease to hold importance. Parochial issues will fade away and be replaced with an overwhelming desire to share this amazing love of God with others. Following Jesus Christ in all that we think, say and do so that we grow daily in faith, hope and love. And in turn change the world. *This is* the more excellent way of living on this earth.

[Darrell Manson] It is only after these terrifying experiences [of a world without love] that they find the life-after-Andy that suits them. Resurrection is probably too strong a word, but they are in many ways finally born again to a new life.⁴

In closing, I can't read this scripture without thinking of our member Max Maldonado, whose tag line for life and for his construction business with his partner Eddie Lucero was "it's all about love, baby." I pray for Max every morning when I get my coffee, as he remodeled much of my house about 6 years ago. It was 4 years ago this month that Max had a seizure while swimming alone, and remains in a coma to this day. He loved children – all children – and loved being of service to others.

There are great kids at Hope Gardens, who long to act like children. Let's keep on loving them with our toys, and our gifts, and our actions, advocating for them to have a good home. And maybe Woody and Buzz can join them, too. Because faith hope and love abide, these three – but the greatest of these is love.

Amen.

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¹ Yo, Buzz, Woody, and the Gang Say Farewell, posting at www.hollywoodjesus.com, <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/dvdDetail.cfm?i=23DDAFD4-E080-1C88-B5998952A3A71BA8&ia=4BCD4C16-A5F9-3B3F-FF596D39A9A9E9A0&pageNumber=2>

² The Very Rev. Robert Wright, "Love is for Grown Ups," Day 1.org, January 31, 2010, <http://day1.org/1711-love-is-for-grownups>

³ Darrell Manson, "The Ultimate Transition," posting at www.hollywoodjesus.com, <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/DVDDetail.cfm/i/23DDAFD4-E080-1C88-B5998952A3A71BA8/ia/4BCBD96B-EDFC-F05F-849F081C0849FDOC>

⁴ Manson