



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

## CROSSFLIX: RATATOUILLE

Sunday, July 27, 2008

**Sermon by Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma, Senior Pastor**

**Scripture: Romans 8: 26-39**

There are many things I admire about our wonderful nursery caregiver, Fran Phinney – her patience with our kids, the long hours she works and the lengths she goes to on birthdays and at Christmastime to make sure each child knows he or she is special. But there's something else too.

She sees almost every kids' movie the weekend it comes out. And yes you could say it's to help her in her work so she can talk with parents about what movie is appropriate or not, and know which ones are age appropriate, etc.

But no. That's not the reason, or at least not the only one. She loves them because they are fun! And they have a good lesson in them, most of the time. I suspect it's also because she enjoys seeing kids enjoy movies and films. She's just being herself.

Well, Fran wasn't the only adult who enjoyed *Ratatouille*, which came out last year – Mark Stephenson loaned me his personal copy to screen for this series. I gotta tell you – I wasn't really thrilled about seeing a movie about a rat cooking in a kitchen. The last parsonage I lived in had rats. They aren't cute or cuddly. So I had to suspend belief big-time to even want to turn on the dvd. But it was worth it.

Here's the story. Remy the rat lives in a French country house with his pack. Unlike the rest of his family, Remy is a foodie. He has an innate ability to smell ingredients in food and think of what ingredients would smell and taste good together. Remy has been sneaking alone into the kitchen, reading from the cookbook of his hero: the Parisian chef Auguste Gusteau (who had died after a brutal review by food critic Anton Ego).

In this clip, Remy and his brother Emile have gone into the kitchen to get a bit of saffron for their dinner meal. Remy sees Gasteau on tv and is transfixed. Their escapade is cut short when the owner, an old woman named Mabel, wakes and discovers them.

But before he is forced out, Remy gets to hear Gusteau say the most important thing – in fact, the point of the movie – no matter who you are, you must be yourself. Which, for Remy, meant despite overwhelming and obvious obstacles, becoming a chef at Gusteau’s restaurant.

When Remy finds himself in Paris after being separated from his family, he goes straight to the kitchen of Gusteau’s restaurant. At the same time, a young lad named Linguini is hired as a garbage boy and accidentally ruins a batch of soup. Remy races around the kitchen tossing in ingredients to save the soup. The soup is given to a food critic; it is an overwhelming success and Linguini’s career as a chef is born. It doesn’t take Linguini long to figure out that it was Remy who had created the soup. They team up together to reinvent Gusteau’s restaurant legacy.

One evening Remy encounters his brother Emile by chance, and is soon reunited with the rest of his family. His father, who long ago thought his gift was useful only for knowing what substances were poisonous, comes to Remy and tells him he is proud of him and what he has accomplished. Nevertheless, he warns Remy that the world will never really accept a rat as a chef – nor will humans and rats ever really get along in this world. Let’s watch.

Here’s the second lesson of the film: be yourself. Be yourself even if the rest of the world seems to be against you. Be yourself.

The great theologian Paul Tillich once said it like this:

*You are accepted. You are accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you don’t know...Simply accept the fact that you are accepted. When that happens, we experience grace.*

And when we experience grace, we know that we can be ourselves in spite of whatever the world thinks because we all are created in God’s image and are loved by God beyond measure.

Our Vacation Bible School children learned about being ourselves in spite of what the world thinks this past week. They learned the story of the Good Samaritan in different modalities each day, and how to apply that lesson in our every day lives. When his mom asked him what he learned, 6 year old Donovan said “aloe is in stuff we use to make us feel better” and “we should always help people if we can because everyone is our neighbor”.

Now, the world would have us believe that not everyone is our neighbor. That we have to look out for ourselves first and others only if we have time. That Wall Street “just got drunk” and there was just nothing any of us could do, least of all our elected officials, to stop the gap between rich and poor from growing ever wider. That those persons who don’t look like us, or talk like us, or love like us aren’t really our neighbors and we shouldn’t concern ourselves with them. And yet we know that to be ourselves – really and truly be ourselves – we must love God and love our neighbors – ALL of them,

no matter what they look or talk like, or whom they love. That was what the Samaritan did – even though the world hated him because of who he was, he didn't let that stop him from doing God's justice in this world.

Mother Teresa put it this way:

*The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one's neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.*

When we help one another, by definition we are loving our neighbor. That's what it means.

An example from yesterday – 18 people from HUMC went to Lynwood and helped to frame a house for Habitat for Humanity. Here's a picture of the group before they got too dirty.

More opportunities to serve with Habitat, or to cook for residents at the PATH shelter here in Hollywood, are coming soon. Today at the Welcome Booth you can sign up to do phone banking for the No on Proposition 8 campaign – a position endorsed by our Annual Conference last month. You can also sign up to volunteer for the World Vision Global AIDS exhibit at Holman UMC in mid-August. You will also have the opportunity to form a human red AIDS ribbon on the field at Dodger Stadium on September 5<sup>th</sup>. By taking these actions we are being ourselves – United Methodists who love God and who love our neighbors. At Church Council today we'll be discussing other ways we as a church can bear witness to the love of God in the midst of our hurting world.

I want to go a step further, if I may be so bold as to augment Mother Teresa's remarks on the greatest evil. It's not just indifference toward one's neighbor who lives at the roadside. It's also the lack of love and charity towards those whom we consider to be of sacred worth yet whose commitments we are restricted from celebrating.

One couple who were recently married in a civil ceremony wrote this in their invitation:

*Though [we] believe that God gifted us to each other 20 years ago and never felt the need for the approval of the state or the church, the joy and fulfillment we've experienced as a result ... is a testament to the power of covenant relationship in whatever form it may take... we are confident that the Great Spirit is present in this act of commitment and that with love as our guidepost we can face the future with purpose, humility, and integrity.*

In today's reading from the epistle to the Romans, Paul talks about how all of can and should face the future with purpose, humility and integrity. In perhaps the most important verse of the entire epistle, Paul asks: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (verse 31).

We say that in a little different way on our website, in articulating what we here at Hollywood UMC believe. We say: we believe God is for us, and not against us. So if we believe that God is for us, then indeed there is nothing—nothing at all – that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

And if nothing can separate us from that great love of God in Jesus Christ, then we are free – free to be whom God has called us to be – faithful disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Even if it seems like the rest of the world is against us, we can ground ourselves in God’s grace and love and work for God’s justice.

At the end of *Ratatouille*, Remy comes to understand what consequences can come with being oneself. When Linguini shares that Remy is the real chef, the rest of the cooks abandon the kitchen – for the most important food critic in Paris is in the dining room and they want no part of a meal cooked by a rat. Even though he knows the world would not approve, Remy decides to save the day by bringing in reinforcements to cook – his family of rats. The critic, of course, loved the *Ratatouille* that Remy prepared. Linguini came clean about the cooking rat brigade, and here’s what the food critic named “Ego” wrote:

Be yourself.

Be yourself even if it seems the world is against you.

Remember that God is for you, not against you.

Those are good lessons from a Disney movie, even if the last one belongs less to Disney and more to St. Paul. So maybe I should add one more: go see kids’ movies so that you, as well as Fran, can teach our children well.

Amen.

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