

Movie Message on Advent Love: Chicken Little
Romans 8:35-39
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St. John United Methodist Church
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David Beckett, D.Min.

Today's Advent theme is love. Christmas is about God's Love coming to the world as a newborn baby. Artists, musicians, greeting card designers, and movie makers have since tried to portray this Love in many ways. The problem is that our very real and sometimes messy lives don't often match a beautiful Christmas greeting card scene or a Hallmark movie.

We talk a lot in the church about grace and unconditional love but really and truly, we don't give ourselves permission to receive it or offer it to others. We live in a world where, like our homes, our status, and our money, Love needs to be earned.

If you wondered about my choice of King Kong last Sunday you will also wonder about today's movie, Chicken Little. It's not a Christmas movie but it is about this feeling we often have about needing to earn the love of others. Whose approval have you been trying hard to receive? For many it is their parents. In the movie Chicken Little has embarrassed his father in front of the whole town because he falsely claimed that the sky was falling. No one will let him forget his big mistake. This scene depicts the sadness he feels and the strain with his father.

VIDEO CLIP

If it is true that God loves people through other people then it is also true that many children and teens grow up without truly experiencing God's unconditional love. This is because many kids have not had parents and adults who were able to give them God-Love. If children do not have good models of God-Love in human form then they will learn to love in the way of the world. This way is not about forgiveness but resentment. It is not about selflessness, but self-centeredness. This way is not about being loved no matter what, but about keeping score and earning love.

In our scripture from Romans we have what I believe to be the best words in the Bible about God's love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We may be living as though love is to be earned but the reality is that this philosophy of life cannot separate us from God's love. The reality is that God loves you. You cannot change this fact. How you choose to live your life does not affect God's love for you. You can be young, old, male or female, gay or straight, fully abled or partially abled, Muslim or atheist. God will love you no matter what. The proof of this love came to Bethlehem in an animal stable.

But we still can't shake this feeling that we have to do something to earn this love. And this happens to Chicken Little. Since his dad was a big baseball star in high school he launched a plan to play baseball and hope for a chance to be a hero. After sitting out the entire season he finally gets a chance to play in the last game. With the championship on the line he closes his eyes and swings and hits a long ball

to the outfield. He scored the winning run and is the great hero, just as he dreamed it.

Something very similar happened to me when I first started playing little league baseball. I was thin and not very athletic and no one expected much from me. But late in the first game of the season I got up to bat. Those pitches seemed to come at me so fast. After two called strikes I heard the coach yell at me to swing at the ball. At the very next pitch I saw that white ball coming at me against the black canvas of the night sky. I closed my eyes and swung hard. I shocked everyone including myself by driving that ball deep into centerfield. I ran to first base and watched as the ball sailed deep towards the fence. All thoughts of a home run at my first at bat were dashed as the centerfielder caught the ball against the fence.

As I ran to the dugout everyone was cheering for me and slapping me on the back. Even though I had made an out they must have thought I was going to be a pretty good hitter. Little did they know. And later in the season when my play did not measure up to that night I learned that love in this world must be earned. No one on hands it out for free.

In the movie Chicken Little enjoys the newfound love and respect of his father after being the hero of the game.

VIDEO CLIP

My apologies for using another personal illustration but when I was in the 8th grade I discovered again how the world loves. I was in the school spelling bee at Wilson Junior High in Hamilton, Ohio. The entire school gathered to watch the big event. Eventually everyone was eliminated except Robert Reilly, the smartest kid in the 9th grade and me, a puny 8th grader. Robert Reilly won the spelling bee the year before. Everyone knew he would win again, especially against me. He misspelled the word rendezvous which I spelled correctly. Thank God for those French classes. Then I had to spell one more word to win. The word was another French word: roulette. Slowly and carefully I spoke each letter. My mouth had gone completely dry. When I said the last "e" into the microphone everyone erupted in cheers and applause.

I remember the accolades and pats on the back walking through the halls. People I hardly knew wanted to sit with me at lunch. That lasted for about a week. I learned a lot about conditional love at Wilson Junior High School.

Where did you learn about conditional love? At school, in your neighborhood, in your family? When this is the kind of love we know throughout most of our lives it can be hard to feel comfortable in church. It can be hard to accept the fact that God loves us unconditionally. It can be hard to give this kind of love to others.

In the movie the town is being invaded by aliens. Chicken Little decides to have a long overdue heart to heart talk with his father in a movie theater. The Ugly Duckling is hysterical, saying "It's like War of the Worlds out there!" Seeing the conflict between father and son, she says, "Would you two stop messing around and deal with the problem?" Taking in a deep breath, Chicken Little looks up at his dad and says, "You're never there for me! You were there for me when I won the big

game, but not when I thought the sky fell, and not at the ball field, and certainly not now!"

His father is surprised by the hurt in his son's voice. He says that ever since Chicken Little's mother died it has been hard, because she was the one that was good with emotions. He says he is going "to need a lot of work." Then he looks at his son and says, "But you need to know that I love you -- no matter what. And I'm sorry if I ever made you feel that was something you had to earn." Chicken Little runs to his father's arms and they hug.

VIDEO CLIP

I was 19 when I remember my dad coming to me after a moving church service. He put his arms around me and said, "I love you, son" for what I remember being the first time in my life. Tears splashed the floor in less than a second. Ever since then I remember this feeling when I watch a movie where fathers and sons come together in forgiveness and reconciliation. It is a profound experience because it doesn't happen very often. Male culture in our country is not about unconditional love, but mostly about earning respect. Whether it's the American high school, or our prisons, or the business world men are shaped to earn what they want in life. There are no free lunches.

Many men have trouble expressing their feelings, and this leaves others, especially their children to feel as if they are not worthy to be loved. This leads some people on an impossible quest to earn the love of others.

What about you? Are you still living your life, making decisions, setting priorities, spending money, seeking job promotions in order to earn the love of someone in your life? That person may not even be living and still we cannot shake the fact that we need their approval.

The good news of Christmas is that Love comes to us, not as a matter of earning, but as a consequence of who we are. God does not love us based on our income, our abilities, our gender, our sexual identity, or our race. The world likes to think that these things matter and all too often we get sucked into believing the myth. God loves us simply because we are children of God.

May this Christmas be the time when finally, finally you and I get it. It's not about earning God's love. It's about opening our hearts to let Jesus into our lives as a very special gift.