

Movie Message: Seabiscuit
Ephesians 4:25-32
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St. John United Methodist Church
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I believe one of the most significant problems affecting families across our country is uncontrolled anger. It is a factor in domestic violence, alcohol abuse, crimes of passion, and road rage. The featured movie today is Seabiscuit. This is the true story of three lost men: Red Pollard, a young man whose spirit had been broken; Charles Howard, a millionaire who lost everything; and Tom Smith, a cowboy whose world was vanishing. These three men found each other and with a small and rebellious race horse named Seabiscuit, they all discovered hope and a second change at life.

Each of these three men had good reasons to be angry. Life had dealt them some bad cards. Young Red Pollard came from a good Canadian family who was forced to separate after the stock market crash of 1929 left them in poverty. The sense of abandonment and hurt easily transformed into anger and he learned to harden his heart and keep others at a distance. His natural connection with horses would prove to be his salvation.

Tom Smith's knowledge of horses was becoming devalued as the automobile replaced the horse. Charles Howard was a successful businessman who lost much of his money in the crash, his son in an auto accident, and his marriage. These three men and a rebellious horse came together to inspire a desperate nation caught in the throes of an economic disaster.

In this scene, Red Pollard, Seabiscuit's jockey, is riding in their first big race. At a crucial moment, another rider appears to be trying to steer Red into the rail. Red lost it, and pushed Seabiscuit too early, costing him the race. When he comes back to the stalls, Smith meets him there.

Smith, angry, says, "What were you thinkin'?" Red, clearly frustrated, replies, "He fouled me, what did you want me to do, let him get away with that?" Smith explains, "Well, yeah. When he's 40-1!" Red can't believe what he's hearing, "He almost put me in the rail!" Smith, calming down, says, "Well did he? Look, we had a plan." Red yells, "He fouled me, Tom! What am I supposed to do? He cut me off! He fouled me!" Charles Howard, the owner, sees that more is going on here than meets the eye and says, "Son, what are you so mad at?"

And then, in a flashback, we see how his parents abandoned him as a child because they were poor. Red is angry at the world, and it is coming out in this moment of anger. His anger is deeper than the situation warrants. This is what happens when we bottle up our hurts. They only fester and feed the angry spirit within us.

Scripture is clear. Anger is not sinful. Ephesians says, "Be angry, but do not sin." (Eph. 4:26) Jesus was angry. But anger can easily get beyond our control. It has the potential to become like a wild horse we cannot tame. Anger is an automatic emotional response to a real or perceived threat. It generates two things: energy as

well as the motivation to eliminate the threat. Anger refers to the entire range of emotions from low-level irritation to out-of-control rage.

How would you describe the anger in your life? Do you tend to keep the emotion of anger bottled up inside you? Is there no cork in you so that every feeling of anger gets expressed no matter who is present to receive it? Or do you feel you cannot express your anger to the appropriate person so you unload it on others?

How we feel and express anger depends on many factors: birth order, personality, family background, and mental health. Most of it has to do with how we feel about ourselves. If we are highly insecure about who we are and our place in the world we are likely to perceive threats easily, and therefore want to defend ourselves by feeling anger and giving energy to it.

But sometimes it has to do with how much we have been hurt in life. In this clip Charles and Tom meet for the first time. Charles wants to hire Tom to find and train a race horse for him.

“You don’t just throw a whole life away just because he’s banged up a little.” Our world needs more of this attitude. We live in a throw-away society. Our food is packaged in throw-away containers. Do you know how many plastic shampoo/conditioner/lotion bottles we have in our house? What happened to the concept of using all of a product before it gets tossed in our landfills?

The metaphors are clear. Tom Smith can heal a broken horse because he can. It is a beautiful gift in a person to see through the pain and woundedness and anger of a human soul to see that hope is possible. These three men were living through their pain believing in each other and a horse named Seabiscuit.

Who are the hurting, angry people in your life? Can you see through the anger to see the beauty that is possible? Can you look at them with God-eyes and refuse to toss them aside, knowing that with God all things are possible?

Tom Smith talks about the first time he saw Seabiscuit.

Oh how we need people who will look past our wounds, past our hurts, past our anger to see into our eyes! We need to look at others the way God looks at them to see the beauty, to see the wholeness that is possible, to see the love.

Understanding each others’ stories is an important part of being healed of the damaging effects of deep anger. In the movie much time is spent depicting the pain of these three men. But it wasn’t just the men. Seabiscuit had a similar story.

“He did what he was trained to do. He lost.” How many children in the world today grow up to lose? How many children are raised to believe that they will never go to college or make something of themselves? How many children living in poverty or without parents will believe that they are destined to lose in order to make winners look good?

There is a connection between hurt and anger. If you want to explore the reasons for your anger then begin with your hurts, even the ones you felt when you were a child. The more time you spend with your hurt without seeking healing or forgiveness, the easier it is to move to the anger stage. People who have been hurt a lot in life often choose to cut themselves off emotionally from others. And they find it easy to feel threatened by others. The next time someone is overly angry with you see if you can look through the anger to see a wounded child. Instead of responding with anger of our own maybe it will help us look upon them with compassion.

In the movie Tom Smith looked through Seabiscuit's wounded past to see the potential. Inside the heart of this beaten and angry animal was a horse who loved to run. Smith said, "He has forgotten what he was born to do. He needs to learn how to be a horse again."

There are people in this world who have forgotten what they were created to be, or perhaps they never knew. That's why they need the Church. That's why they need God. Let's face it. We all are broken. We all have lost our way at one time or another. We all stand in need of the grace and forgiveness of God.

We really do need each other, broken and angry as we are. So let's stop trying to be so defensive when we perceive a threat. With God in our lives we can lessen the severity of our angry responses to life. Together with the power of God's Holy Spirit we can find healing and wholeness together.