

Luke 24:1-12:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Isaiah 65:17-25:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

I went to a movie a few weeks ago. One thing I noticed the movie did really well was that it got you to feel real compassion for the hero of the story, and real hatred for the villain. And you know how it goes. The bad guys do bad things to the hero and they seem to be winning, but then, there's that moment when the tables turn and our hero gets his revenge. No one applauded in the movie theater, but I'm sure some people thought about it.

It's classic Hollywood, right? The hero gets revenge. Rocky Balboa knocks out Apollo Creed.<sup>1</sup> Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch of the West.<sup>2</sup> Wyatt Earp leaves any number of bad guys dead in the Tombstone streets.<sup>3</sup> Harry Potter turns Voldemort into floating ash.<sup>4</sup> We love these moments. They touch something deep inside of us.

So, imagine the Hollywood version of the story of Jesus. Jesus is the perfect hero. He's kind. He's good. He's brave. He's charismatic. It's Hollywood, I'm sure he's good-looking. And you have all kinds of villains. You have the sneaky Pharisees plotting against him. The fickle crowds who seem to be on his side, then change sides. The brutal, uncaring Romans who use their legal and physical power against him. Jesus' traitorous friend who betrays him. And then, in perfect Hollywood plotting, the villains all team up against our poor hero.

As the story goes on, we sympathize more and more with Jesus, and we hate the villains more and more. Can't you imagine the dramatic music as they nail Jesus to the cross? And then the literally unthinkable happens. Our hero is dead. Evil has won. How can that happen? And what happens now?

In true Hollywood fashion, the answer is, of course, a sequel. Three days later the tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. He's come back with all the power of God, and, to quote Wyatt Earp in one of the many movie versions, Hell is coming with him.<sup>5</sup>

He takes his revenge, and takes a whole movie to do it. He nails every Roman soldier and official to a cross and watches them die. He waves his hand at the Pharisees and they burn up like roman candles. The crowds are back on his side, firmly this time. Since we have children

---

<sup>1</sup> *Rocky II* (1979)

<sup>2</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

<sup>3</sup> Too many movies and television shows to list, from silent movies to the present.

<sup>4</sup> *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (2011).

<sup>5</sup> *Tombstone* (1993).

here, I can't even describe what happens to Judas. The movie climaxes with Jesus fighting Caesar and High Priest Caiaphas in hand-to-hand combat in the Roman Coliseum, and killing them both.

That is what Hollywood would do with the story of Jesus. And it would probably be a blockbuster.

Thank God, Hollywood didn't write the story of Jesus. God did. And God wrote an ending in which Jesus chooses forgiveness over revenge, mercy over justice. I don't know how many movie tickets it would sell, but it has changed the world forever.

You see, revenge, no matter how much a part of us wants it, just perpetuates pain in this world. Hurt people hurt other people, making them into hurt people, and that cycle repeats forever, until someone stops the cycle. Because we have been hurt before, we fear being hurt again. That fear leads to anger against the people we are afraid of, whether or not they have done anything to deserve our anger. Anger leads to hate, and hate leads to revenge for some slight, real or imagined, and the cycle continues.<sup>6</sup>

The good news this morning is that God has stepped in to stop that vicious cycle. God offers us an ending with hope, because, in the end, love is more powerful than hate, and forgiveness gives life; revenge takes it.

We have all been hurt at one time or another. That's the way that it goes. Every one of us has been part of one of those vicious cycles, whether we instigated it or not. Every one of us has

---

<sup>6</sup> "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." – Master Yoda, *Star Wars – Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.

been hurt by a hurt person, and every one of us has hurt someone in response. Every one of us has, on a small or large scale, tried to live out that Hollywood ending.

Right now, it seems like the whole world is trying to live in a movie that will have a Hollywood ending, doesn't it? Hurt gets returned for hurt, insult for insult, violence for violence. Whether it is gossip in the office, shootings in the street, or massive bombs dropped from aircraft, the difference is the scale, not the substance.

That is not the world that God wants for you. Or for me. Or for *them*. Whoever you thought of when I said, "them."

And what God wants, God eventually gets. God's like that.

Truly I tell you, this movie, call it *The History of the World*, does not have a Hollywood ending. This movie has a God ending.

We haven't seen the shooting script for this movie,<sup>7</sup> we don't know all the specifics of how it will happen, but we have the script synopsis.

Listen again to some of God's plot notes: "I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress." God will delight in God's people. "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be." People will have what they need. That makes for peace. "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord."

That is the ending of this movie.

---

<sup>7</sup> This isn't *The Muppet Movie*.

No matter what we see out there right now, that is where this world is going.

What would happen if we started living as though we knew that ending was coming?

We would renounce evil and its power in the world. We would stop playing the game of tit-for-tat nastiness. We would forgive evil that other people do to us. We would do good things, even for people who hate us.

We would turn to Jesus Christ, and trust in his grace and love.

I will not try to deceive you. We will get hurt this way. No matter where we go, there will be hurt people around us, still taking part in the vicious cycle of insult for insult, hate for hate, injury for injury. We will get hurt, but we trust that in Jesus there is healing, and we know the end of the story.

We will get pulled into vicious cycles of nastiness and sin, and we will have to keep coming back. This is why we confess our sins every week, and every week we are assured of God's forgiveness. We need it every week, and we live in a world that needs it every week. But God is willing to forgive us.

By living this way, we would be Christ's faithful disciples, obeying his word and showing his love to the people around us. Kindness doesn't cost a thing. Graciousness doesn't cost a thing. Sprinkle that stuff everywhere.<sup>8</sup> Living this way is such a contrast to the world around us, that it causes attention.

---

<sup>8</sup> Paraphrased from Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, whose version of that statement works for her ministry context, but not mine.

And the amazing thing is that we get to experience some of that ending before the movie's over. We get to experience peace, on a level that is beyond what we can imagine. We get to experience healing. Healing of all our hurts, even the ones that we long ago decided are too old, they're just part of who we are. In a world of brokenness, this how we can be whole.

May it be so for all of us.

AMEN