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“Faith @ The Movies – Wall-E”

I John 4.7, 16-21

Word has it that members of the Swedish medical community believe that if they speak happily over a patient while operating the patient will heal more quickly after awakening from anesthesia and recover faster. In respect for that discovery, I plan to preach happily over you today so that when you wake at the end of my sermon you will feel healed and refreshed.

Full disclosure...I Love Wall-E! This movie is fun ... challenging ... hopeful ... and it calls forth something in my soul to be MORE than I am.

There’s a scene in Wall-E on the luxury cruise spaceship, where all the humans are living the so-called good life. In fact, they are living such a good life that they all become fat to the point of being almost boneless and lazy.

The filmmaker, Andrew Stanton, said he wanted to show, in an exaggerated sense what it would be like focused only on your own pleasure with no real purpose in life. These humans sit in large La-Z-Boys that float around the ship because they can no longer walk.

The humans have been on this 700 year luxury cruise-like vacation in space and they have forgotten what it really means to be human...to live for something greater than yourself.

Reminds me of what the philosopher Martin Heidegger once said, “We live in one of two ways: A forgetfulness of being or a mindfulness of being...” He said, “the habits, routines and temptations of daily life have a way of numbing us from that which is truly life.”

The philosopher, Van Goethe, said it in another way in a quote you've heard me say 1000 times, "The things that are most important are always at the mercy of the things that are least important." And when your center is made of those things that are least important you begin to lose your center and forget what is most important.

This message series is called Faith@The Movies. I believe one of the questions this week's movie asks: What does it mean to live...to truly live?

From a faith perspective, what does it mean to be human...to be created in the image of God...to be a child of God?

Our Bible reading today reminds us of probably the most simple yet profound truth of all: God is love! We are created in the image of that love. Our essence, our best self, our highest self, our true self is LOVE. To live then to truly live is to love!

Which brings me back to Wall-E...While the humans in this story are seduced into being satisfied with meeting only their more primitive needs...having forgotten what it means to be human...Wall-E, the little robot, in contrast, is searching for meaning and truth.

Let me give you a quick synopsis in case you haven't seen the movie. Wall-E is the last robot left on the planet earth in the year 2700. Humans have abandoned the polluted earth on a 700 year spaceship cruise leaving behind Wall-Es, small trash compactor robots, to clean-up the horrific mess humans have made. Our Wall-E is the only one left working.

Certainly, it's difficult to see this movie and not be confronted by our own rampant consumerism, greed, selfishness and lack of care of God's fragile earth. We're reminded of how easy it is to be

caught in a forgetfulness of being and not be conscious of how every choice we ... and every step we take has an impact and leaves a footprint on sacred planet earth. This movie certainly challenges us to take up our holy calling as stewards of the earth with a sense of urgency. But, ultimately Wall-E is about much more than that.

Wall-E collects treasures among the trash. One of these treasures Wall-E found in the garbage is a tape of “Hello Dolly”. He keeps watching one handholding scene over and over again, almost as if it is summoning forth in him the capacity to love.

We begin to discover how this robot, this piece of technology, is more human than the humans that created him. Wall-E longs for life and love in ways that the humans on the luxury spaceship seem to have totally forgotten. Let’s have a look at Wall-E. (VIDEO)

Wall-E continues, day in and day out, to do his task of cleaning up the earth, until a “female” robot, named Eve, comes along. Wall-E falls in love.

Eve, or Extra-Terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator, is on a mission to see if the earth can once again sustain life, be re-born. If so, humans can one day return to earth. When Eve is taken away, Wall-E climbs aboard and hangs on for the journey to the space ship where the humans are.

Ironically, we discover while Wall-E has been trying to learn about what it is to be human, the humans adrift in the cosmic space station have grown robot-like, tethered to machines and out of touch with each other, out of touch with their own creative impulses, out of touch with their reason for being. Have a look (video – blue is new red?).

Their lives have been so centered on the least important things they are no longer aware of what is most important.

The filmmaker, Andrew Stanton, who is a Christian, said that what really interested him in the story line was “the idea that the most human thing in the universe would be a machine, a robot that has more interest in discovering the point of living than actual people. It is the robot who is the only one who is actually awake...mindful.

Stanton says the greatest commandment Christ gives us is to love – it is love that calls forth our highest self, our essence, our true self – “but, if we’re honest”, Stanton says, “Love is rarely our priority. And there are so many obstacles in the world that stand in the way of love. So, “Stanton says “I wanted to show in this movie that irrational love will always defeat the world’s programming.”

That’s what Stanton says his film is really all about...the idea that irrational love will always defeat the world’s programming and our need for the impulse of that love in our lives to be awakened.

That’s why Stanton created Wall-E and Eve to work literally against their own programming by experiencing first an irrational love for each other and then for all humanity.

Stanton said he wanted to use a little robot to remind us what it means to be human, created in the image of God, a God who is love...

One of my favorite scenes is when the humans wake up and become mindful to what they have long since forgotten. Have a look (VIDEO).

I had just finished watching Wall-E again earlier this week thinking about the filmmaker’s premise that irrational love defeats the world’s programming when I saw the news regarding the

release of the convicted Lockerbie bomber on compassionate grounds.

My heartfelt sympathy is certainly with the families who live every day with the loss of their loved ones. I listened to a few of the family members interviewed and the hate and desire for vengeance was palpable. I can definitely understand that. Hear me clearly, I am not sitting in judgment. I can't imagine being in their place. I can't even begin to fathom their pain and grief.

Yet, I couldn't help but think of the cycle of hate and violence and retribution that seems to be the world's programming... the way the world is wired to operate. To choose love and mercy in this instance in particular would be completely irrational...would go against all of the world's programming.

Theologian Reinhold Neibuhr said showing love to those who have hurt us is the highest form of love summoning our highest self. When the wound is deep and the pain severe, to choose love is irrational and costly.

The cross of Jesus Christ, reminds us how costly. It was Jesus, nailed to the cross, who spoke words of forgiveness to his executioners. That love was so strong we believe that even death could not contain it.

The scandal of the gospel is that we are loved with that kind of irrational love even and especially when we least deserve it.

- It is this kind of irrational love the Bible is referring to when it says, "God is love."
- It is this irrational love that connects us to and summons forth our highest and best self.
- It is this irrational love Jesus commands us to offer the world.
- It is this irrational love that carries the hope that one day the world's programming will be defeated!

The Church of Scotland issued a statement on the release of the Lockerbie bomber this past week on compassionate grounds as he is in the last stages of Prostate cancer, by saying, “We are defined as individuals and as a nation by how we treat those who have chosen to hurt us. Do we choose mercy even when they did not choose mercy?”

The church’s statement said this decision was about whether Scotland, as a nation, despite the continuing pain of many, was willing to be merciful...was willing to love.

The church statement said, ‘We understand the deep anger and grief that still grips the souls of the victims’ families and we respect their views.

But to them we would say justice is not lost in acting in mercy. Instead, our deepest humanity is expressed for the better. To choose mercy is the tough choice, and today our nation met the challenge. We have gained something significant as a nation by this decision. It is a defining moment for us all.”

It is irrational love that carries the hope that one day the world’s programming will be defeated – and that irrational love is carried in your heart.