

**God Knows Us Inside-Out**

COMMUNION

July 5, 2020

Matthew 11: 16-19 and 25-30

*<sup>16</sup> "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, <sup>17</sup> 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; <sup>19</sup> the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

*<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Romans 7: 15-25a

*<sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

*<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

This morning we begin the second week in our “God at the Movies” series. This week’s movie is “Inside Out”. The movie focuses on the emotions inside a young, eleven-year-old girl named Riley. The emotions that Riley feels are common to all of us. As I watched the film, I could relate to the times in my life when I have felt what Riley felt. The five emotions that are featured as characters in the movie are joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger. Growing up happy in a small Minnesota town, almost all of Riley’s core memories are joyful, happy memories. But a move to California in the midst of the beginning of those teenage angst years spells trouble for Riley and her family. In a similar struggle with the emotions inside of Riley, in our Romans passage, Paul wrestles with the good and evil waging a constant battle within him. Paul wants to do good but finds himself doing what he does not want to do – like in the movie when joy wants to be what Riley feels but sadness rises up instead. In our text from Matthew 11, Jesus first acknowledges a generation struggling to find itself and to correctly identify Jesus for who he is – the one come to do the will of the Father.

The Matthew passage closes with Jesus' invitation to come to him, to find rest for the weary soul. The turning point in "Inside Out" comes when Riley finally lets go as the tears flow. As her parents hold and comfort her, she finds a peace that allows her to move forward in her new life. As we begin to explore these thoughts, please join me in a word of prayer...

In the opening verses of Matthew's text, Jesus speaks of "*this generation*". He expresses some frustration that they sang for them and they did not dance. And when they cried for them, they did not mourn. Even for Jesus, the new generation was hard to figure out. It reminds me of Riley's parents in the movie – as she began to express new emotions as a preteen, they struggled to relate to this new person. Jesus goes on to rue how the people – and especially the religious leaders – misidentified both John the Baptist and Jesus himself. In the end, though, Jesus knows that the Father will vindicate who and what John and Jesus were and are. In verse 25 Jesus thanks God for revealing who he is to "*infants*" – those who would have been pure and open to the truth, those who could see Jesus as the extension of God's love and mercy and grace. And then, in verse 27 Jesus again emphasizes the connection that we touched on last week. Here he reiterates the connection between Jesus the Son and God the Father. At the end of this verse, Jesus shares "*anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*" then one can know the Father too. It is the connection between Jesus and God and us that we looked at last Sunday.

In "Inside Out" the emotion characters have an intimate relationship with Riley. In this way they are like the connection that God has with us. These characters are all invested in Riley. Joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger work together to form her personality. They are, in the words of "Joy", the main emotion, "what make Riley Riley". The core memories are what give Riley her personality and they are what power her personality. In the movie, Riley's personality is represented by "islands". These are components of who she is. There is 'hockey island' and 'goofball island', 'friendship island' and 'honesty island', and, of course, 'family island'. Initially these islands are bright and colorful and filled with positive feelings. This period in Riley's life reminded me of the short time in my life right after becoming a believer. Sometimes referred to as that "on fire" time, all in my faith world seemed so good and all felt so positive. God seemed to be everywhere in those first few months of being a believer. Can you remember those days in your faith journey, those days when you were riding that 'high' of a new faith? There was no doubt, there was no fear of rejection. All you wanted to do was share this wonderful Jesus with anyone and everyone you met. And then life began to happen, and you had to work out your faith in the real world. Do you remember those days too? That is what Paul writes about in Romans 7.

As the family loads up and heads to San Francisco, there is excitement and anticipation about what lies ahead. But then the moving truck is delayed and delayed, and Dad's new job frequently pulls him away. Riley begins to miss her hockey team and her friends. After a few days in the dingy, empty house, it is "Anger" that declares, *"This move is a bust!"* All of the other emotions, even Joy, must agree with Anger's assessment. The non-joy emotions begin to take over

Riley. A new and different preteen Riley begins to emerge. Even the initial excitement of a 'first day of school' quickly disintegrates as Riley breaks down into tears as she herself realizes how much she misses her old home, her old school, her old friends. Back in control central, according to "Fear" it is an unmitigated disaster. As she arrives home, all of Riley's islands of personality are "down". They are all greyed out in the movie. Dinner that night at home quickly spirals downward, emotions erupt, and Riley is sent off to her room. Later that night Dad goes up to check in on her and his attempt at humor, at being a goofball, falls flat with this blue Riley. Goofball Island is down. As Dad's attempt at connecting to the old Riley falls flat, "Goofball Island" topples down into the memory dump, seemingly lost forever.

Paul relates well to this strange new land of unknown, mixed, wild emotions. In verse fifteen Paul writes, *"I do not understand my own actions"*. Even after his powerful encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul still wrestles with the good and evil within him – in verse seventeen he describes this struggle as *"the sin that dwells within me"*. Paul is just like us, isn't he? Paul recognizes that nothing good dwells in the part of him that is flesh. In me that is pride and ego. It is my need to be in control. It is the gluttony that I sometimes struggle with. Perhaps these are some of your struggles. But this is just a partial list for me. My list of struggles, of those sins I wrestle with, is every bit as varied as your list. Paul goes on in verses eighteen and nineteen to name the struggle, the wrestling match within all of us. Here he writes, *"I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do"*. Can you relate to this struggle that Paul is naming? I certainly can.

In the movie, Riley is right there when she realizes her Minnesota friendships are fading and that all she loved in life is back in Minnesota. As “Friendship Island” topples down, an angry Riley decides to run away. As Fear, Disgust, and Anger team up, Riley makes plans, sneaks downstairs, “borrows” her Mom’s credit card, and packs for a bus ride back to Minnesota. These negative emotions are leading Riley to sin, to do things she would not ever normally do. Paul describes this as the *“evil that lies close at hand”* and the evil that *“makes me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members”*.

We can all relate to where Riley is, to where Paul is – at least I can. I believe that at various times in our lives, we have all gone down a road that we should not have gone down. Maybe you are down that road right now. If so, listen closely. In verse 24, Paul cries out, saying, *“Wretched man that I am! Who can rescue me from this body of death?”*

In the movie, it is Sadness that connects first with Bing Bong, Riley’s childhood imaginary friend. Through Sadness’ empathy and understanding, Bing Bong realizes he can offer one last gift to Riley. His self-sacrifice is what allows Joy to escape the memory dump and to reunite with Sadness. They make their way back to the control center. It is there that Sadness again takes over. Joy gives way and Sadness connects with Riley as the bus begins to exit town. This connection allows Riley to feel the pain and hurt and to open herself up to being made whole and new again. This story, this plot line, may sound familiar to you.

When we are hurting or grieving, it is only when we allow ourselves to feel and to work through the pain, that we begin to heal. In our Romans 7 passage, it is only when Paul acknowledges his helplessness and his inability to defeat the power of sin on his own that he comes to the answer to his question. Who will rescue him from the sin? In verse 25 Paul identifies who will rescue him. Paul exclaims, "*through Jesus Christ our Lord*"! It is with thanksgiving to God that Paul recognizes that only Jesus can rescue him from the power of sin and death.

Today, as we come to this table of grace, as we celebrate Holy Communion, we as United Methodists believe that here we are made right again with God. It is through the power of the body broken and the blood poured out that we can be made new again. As we confess our sins, as we turn over our burdens to God, as we repent and beg to be made new again – here we find mercy and grace and forgiveness. It is in and through Christ that we are made new again. We join Paul today in saying, thanks be to God! Amen and amen.