

God Gives Love and Life

August 9, 2020

Matthew 14: 22-33

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Romans 10: 5-15

⁵ Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." ⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'"

(that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

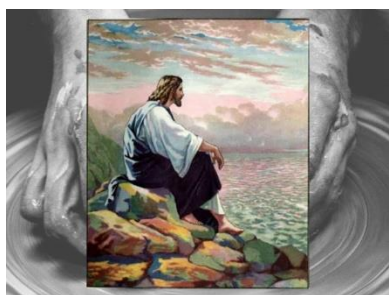


Today's movie is "Coco" – the story of a young boy named Miguel Rivera. Miguel loves music but has to keep it a secret. Ever since his great-great-grandfather

abandoned the family to pursue a music career, all music has been banned from the house. To be a Rivera is to be a shoemaker. That is the focus of almost all they do – there is definitely no room for music. Secretly, Miguel dreams of being Ernesto de la Cruz – the most famous Mexican musician of all time. Miguel's dream is played out in the Land of the Dead. In the end, "Coco" is the story of

how being in a family brings love and meaning to life. As the first text this morning, from Matthew 14, begins, Jesus is in mourning – saddened over the death of John the Baptist. Here, alone on the mountainside, Jesus finds time to grieve. As he draws near to rejoin the disciples, they think Jesus is a ghost as he walks across the water. Peter briefly walks where he should not walk – on the water - until he loses focus on Jesus, causing him to doubt. In fear, he sinks. After rescuing Peter and climbing aboard, the wind and waves calm down, revealing Jesus' power over nature as well as life. In turn, the disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God. Our second passage, from Romans 10, centers on two main ideas. The first is that righteousness comes from faith alone, a faith confessed with our lips and lived out through our hearts. The second idea from Paul is about importance of family – including others into the family of faith, so that they too can be saved. Taken together we will come to see how God desires to love us as a part of his family and to see how God gives us life – real life, with purpose and meaning. Let us pray...

After healing many people and feeding the 5,000 Jesus dismissed the crowd and sent the disciples on ahead in the boat. Jesus then climbs up the mountainside



and spends some time alone in prayer. The death of John the Baptist weighed upon him and he needed to connect with God, to find comfort and strength. By the time Jesus finishes praying, the disciples are now far from land. In the boat, they are being battered by the

wind and waves. As evening comes, Jesus descends the mountain and begins to

walk towards the disciples. As the disciples begin to see something approaching, they fear it to be a ghost. They are terrified and they begin to cry out in fear. Hearing or sensing their fear, Jesus calls out to them, saying, *"Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid"*. But Peter wants proof. Peter calls back, saying, *"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water"*. Peter wants big proof.

In "Coco" young Miguel has doubts too. He doubts much surrounding the *"las ofrendas"* – the shrines to dead loved ones - and the other events connected to *"Día de Muertos"* - the Day of the Dead. It is only when Miguel touches a sacred item belonging to the dead that he comes face to face with the reality of the Land of the Dead. Once he himself is transformed and can see and touch and talk to his deceased relatives and others in the graveyard, only then does he begin to believe as his family believes. As Miguel crosses the marigold bridge he takes in this whole other world. Peter must have experienced a similar epiphany when he steps out in faith. Imagine what it would have been like those first few steps, those solid steps upon the water. Trusting fully in Jesus' call, Peter himself did what Jesus was doing. He was part of the miracle. But the story does not end here, though. Peter walks on water - until the waves draw his attention. He notices the strong wind and becomes frightened. In fear he begins to sink. We read that *"immediately Jesus reached out his hand"* and caught him.



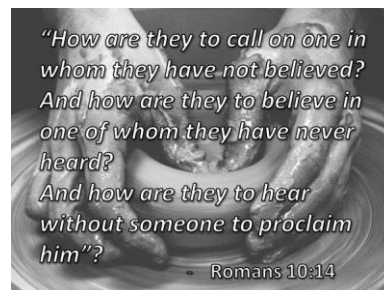
In “Coco” fear almost gets the best of Miguel too. As he is preparing to take the stage for the talent show, he is gripped with fear. Hector gives him great encouragement, leading Miguel to drum up the courage to step out as he declares, *“I need to prove I am worthy of his blessing”*. It was Jesus’ call, *“Come”*, that led Peter to step out. Miguel does step out onto the stage – and then freezes. With a little more encouragement from Hector, he timidly begins. As he plays and sings, he gains a confidence and, after Hector joins Miguel on stage, he feels the music alive inside of him. Peter must have felt Jesus’ power alive in him as he walked on the water.



Paul begins our passage from Romans by reminding his fellow believers that righteousness does not come from the law but from faith in God. Paul speaks of the fact that the word, Jesus, is near to us. So near, in fact, that it is upon our lips and in our hearts. This leads us, as followers, to confess Jesus as Lord and to believe that God raised him from the dead. This belief makes us right with God, or “justifies” us in Paul’s words, and the confession that we make with our lips leads to our salvation. Paul is so confident that he boldly states, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”*. Everyone who professes faith in the risen Christ will be saved.

In verse fourteen, Paul turns our attention to the lost, to those who are not in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In this verse Paul poses three evangelism

questions: *"How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"* For Paul, the answers to these questions lie squarely on the shoulders



of the believers. It is the believers who are sent into the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul is absolutely correct here. If someone never hears about Jesus, how will they ever come to call on him or to even know him? How will the lost hear about Jesus' saving love if we never tell them about Jesus?

It is that tangible connection to Jesus and to his power that makes faith real. For those who believe, we have tangible moments when we have experienced God in our lives. Each and every one of us have a story that we could share that would be encouraging to another. This morning I would like to invite Paul Armstrong to come up. I met with Paul a couple of weeks ago and was blessed to hear part of Paul's journey. Paul and his wife Holly, along with their son Tristan, moved to the area recently and have become connected to Grace. Thank you, Paul, for sharing part of your faith story this morning...



A summary of Paul's testimony: For Sunday, I'm thinking I'll relay the part of my story about the accident, my experience while I was "dead" and what it meant to me and how it changed my life. Simply for context, I would start with a brief history of myself. Nothing in depth, just the high, high notes.

Now, your experience may be different from Paul's. Paul's story is a great example of how God gives love and life. I have had moments and experiences where God has been a tangible presence in my life. Each of us have had moments where God has connected to us personally, pouring love into us and giving us life. Most of our stories are unique; different because God is a personal God. In Romans 10, Paul writes that our righteousness comes from faith. Just like there was nothing that Paul Armstrong did to cause God to bestow favor on him that day and in the days to follow, there is nothing we can "do" to merit God's favor. We simply receive God's presence and blessing and favor in our life when we have the word of God on our lips and in our hearts. In our world and in most of our lives, we know people who are lost, who do not know the love of Jesus Christ. I so appreciate Paul sharing his story with me a couple of weeks ago and then with is all this morning. I would love to hear your stories of how God has been present in a personal and meaningful way in your life. Your story has power. Your story can change lives. Your story might just be the answer to the question that Paul posed in Romans: *How are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?*



In "Coco" the Rivera family believed that "family is who we are". That was very important. Family mattered. But there was no music in Coco's family because they were trapped by their past. It limited who they could become. Miguel was keenly aware of being trapped by the past. Who he felt he was – a musician - could not come out in his current family structure. As I think about people who do not have a relationship with Jesus, they often live lives trapped in the past.

When people cannot experience the mercy and grace and forgiveness of God, they remain burdened by their mistakes and their failures. For folks without faith, in end of life situations, there is no hope, no future. Death is simply “the end”. Their loved one is not more. They will never see them again. There is no concept of resurrection or eternal life. And like Miguel, without a vision for the future, without a purpose outside of our own little world view, people who do not know Jesus live without joy and true contentment. This, my friends, is why we need to be followers of the great commission. Jesus calls us to share our story of faith to the ends of the earth so that all people can come to know Jesus and to have a saving relationship with him.

In this week’s movie and in our lives, it is usually our family that guides us to become who we are. Sometimes it is our nuclear family; sometimes it is the people we surround ourselves with who function as our family. In some cases, there is a tension there. In the movie, the tension was making shoes versus creating music. Often in our lives and in our “families”, the tension is between the lure of the world and the truths and promises of faith. It is often a process to negotiate and work through these tensions. In healthy families, this is possible and even probable. Parents who practice a solid faith usually pass faith along to their children. Parents who are honest and generous, who are respectful and kind, who are forgiving and graceful – these qualities are passed along. The same is true with our friends and others we meet. When we genuinely live out our faith, we are a witness to Christ’s love in the world. Yes, people do maybe notice that we are different when we live out our faith. But people have a much greater opportunity to come to know Jesus when we tell them about our faith.

“Coco” is a movie about borders more than anything — the beauty in their porousness, the absolute pain produced when a border locks you away from your family. The conflict in the story comes from not being able to cross over, to experience life among the living. Faith can be a border too. It can be beautiful, ranging throughout our lives, guiding us and leading us, enabling us to love the least of these. Jesus had a porous love – flowing out, seeping out in many ways. Faith can also be a border that locks one away, that keeps one isolated from the world and from those in need. Think of the Jews’ faith that I spoke of last week – a faith so rooted in the law that they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah. In Miguel’s life, the resolution to his conflict was the love that pulled him through to the other side. As he came to understand his family and the importance of their love for one another, Miguel declared, *“No more music. Family comes first”*. Like Paul from last week’s passage, he was willing to give up something he loved for the sake of his kinfolk. Like Paul and like Jesus, Miguel came to understand that families belong together.

As Jesus walked across the water and joined the disciples in the boat, the wind and the waves gave testimony to the power of Christ. When they understood that Jesus was the Son of God, they worshipped him. Paul pleads with his fellow believers to share the good news of Jesus with the lost, so that they too can enter a saving relationship with the Lord of life. As “Coco” comes to a close, Miguel runs to Mama Coco and plays her the song that her father used to sing to her when she was a little girl, keeping his memory alive. As Coco hears the familiar words to “Remember Me” she too sings and comes alive, once again experiencing love. Love is at the center of the family of God too.

God seeks to give all of us love and life. As followers of Jesus Christ, we experience it a variety of ways, big and small. Each of these experiences are a part of our faith story. The last two weeks I have shared about how God guides our story and about how God seeks to work in our story. This week we hear the call to share our story of faith. In sharing our faith story, others can begin to see how Jesus might be a part of their lives. Paul closes today's passage with a quote from Isaiah 52: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"* My friends, may we have beautiful feet this week. Amen and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) Grow. When has God called you to 'step out of the boat'? What was it like? How did your faith change? If you did not step out when Jesus called, what kept you from doing so? How has that been a growth experience?
- 2) Pray. Who is the Holy Spirit calling you to so that you can share the good news? Pray for guidance and direction to accomplish your calling.
- 3) Study. Read Psalm 105: 1-6 and 16-22. Joseph went on ahead, preparing the way. How has God used you to prepare others for what lies ahead?