

Real Love

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 15: 12-17

Toy Story 2

August 9, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

John 15: 12-17

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

There it is, clear as anything can be. A-N-D-Y carefully spelled out on Woody's cowboy boot in the beginning, hesitant letters of a little boy. While being a toy is a noble calling that brings playtime fun, imaginary adventures, and unconditional love for a child, there is that elite, beloved, treasured, favored status that means much more play time together, extra attention when tears or fear need reassurance, and a forever place in the child's memory that lives on. For years this was Woody's world. He was everything to Andy. But Andy was growing up. Little by little he of course, like we all do, was leaving his toys behind. Even Woody would eventually be left alone, untouched.

Toys expect this. It is the life cycle of a toy, and Woody had had the best of it. He was not lost, unloved, forgotten or destroyed early on, but was blessed to live the richest, fullest life a toy can ever even hope to, or imagine, having.

Woody grieved the growing loss of his beloved playtime with Andy and could not gracefully hang up his spurs when the time came. The thought of being forgotten and kept

indefinitely in storage was unbearable. When he was 'toy-napped', the misfortunate event became the perfect opportunity for Woody to escape his destiny. He would become a star attraction as a famous cowboy TV star in a toy museum in Japan. He would be admired and cheered by millions of people forever. He would be immortal, a priceless collectible.

Woody is so enthralled and starstruck with the idea of this fame and forever life, that he rejects the heroic efforts of his friends to save him from the lonely solitude of a boxed up life on a shelf where he would never be touched, hugged or played with ever again. His fear of rejection blinds him to who and whose he truly is.

Buzz and other toys who have taken great risks in their efforts to rescue Woody physically from the kidnapper must then rescue him emotionally, spiritually. They encourage him to see that he is not a collector's item but a toy.

Buzz reminds Woody, "Somewhere in that pad of stuffing is a toy who taught me that life's only worth living if you're being loved by a kid. And I traveled all this way to rescue that toy, because I believed him."

Woody, so convinced that he is making the right choice, responds by saying, "I don't have a choice, Buzz. This is my only chance."

Buzz tries once more, "To do what, Woody? Watch kids from behind glass and never be loved again? Some life."

Buzz and the other toys leave dejected, helpless and hopeless. Woody's mind is made up. He is determined to live on forever. They don't know that Woody rethinks their visit and conversation.

Woody realizes that has been thinking only of himself, his losses, his doubts, his insecurities. He comes to see that he is making a life-changing decision for all the wrong reasons, and by doing so he is betraying his own values, abandoning his friends, and forgetting Andy.

Andy. There it is, in just 4 letters on the sole of his boot. A-N-D-Y. The forever mark of being loved, treasured and wanted. Woody's denial of time and Andy's growing up would be a denial of everything that they had together. The mark of Andy's love in those 4 letters spoke volumes to Woody, and he realized the mistake he was making to go to the museum, to live in a box only to be seen by strangers. He realized that this was not real love, it was just a mirage, an illusion. He would rather watch Andy grow up and leave his toys behind than live the certainty of a still life in a museum.

Remembering who and whose he is, Woody steps forward in faith to reclaim the life that is his to live. He knows he belongs to Andy, to a life with a boy who is growing up and with a room full of friends, friends who had even put themselves at great risk and in danger to bring him back. Woody is reminded of the mark that was placed on him by the one who loved him more than all. He is reminded of the love of his friends, and what they had done for him. His mind and his heart have been changed.

The mark of being loved, of being treasured and wanted, the mark that is a reminder of who and whose we are; we too have that mark upon us as we were marked at our baptism with water and the Holy Spirit as the sign and seal of our common discipleship, acceptance and participation in God's forgiveness. The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. We are marked forever as God's beloved. We bear the mark that was placed on us by the one who loves us more than we can ever know or imagine.

Like Woody though, we too though can lose sight of the mark upon us and go wandering in a way that feels right, seems right, until those who love us open our eyes and lead us back. We can lose sight of God's mark upon us, we can get caught up in life's daily realities, as well as the

bigger struggles and challenges that come along. We can think that we are out of choices and options until someone we love, and who loves us, calls us back.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, and so to us, reminds us that through Jesus Christ we have been destined for adoption as children of God, in a love and grace freely bestowed on us. By faith, and as Paul says, "...the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" marks us with the seal of the Holy Spirit---the forever mark of being loved, treasured and wanted. It is the mark of who and whose we are.

Woody's mark was bold and visible on his boot, yet it took his friends, the ones closest to him, to get him to again see that mark, and it took some serious risks for that to happen. Sometimes it takes our friends, those who love us the most, to take some risks to reopen our eyes to our mark as God's beloved. Our minds and hearts can be changed by the love of friends.

There was a second mark on Woody, and it is on all of us as well. It is an unseen as the seal as God's beloved, yet as real as the letters on Woody's cowboy boot. The mark of friendship, the gift of family not related by blood, the family you choose for yourself, who love you for who you are at your best, just as much as in your tender, vulnerable, messy times.

Friendship is such a valuable gift, such a life-giving love, that Jesus spoke of it when he taught the greatest commandment. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' Jesus said these words to his disciples at the Last Supper, knowing what lay ahead. He called his disciples his friends, reminded them of his love for them, told them that the greatest love of all was to lay down one's life for one's friends, and then he went out and did it.

Woody's heart, Woody's life, was transformed by the love of his friends and the risks that they took for him. We may never be called on to take serious risks or encounter dangers for our friends. Hopefully we never take the literal step of laying down our lives for our friends, but when we offer welcome, listening, authenticity, vulnerability, compassion, care, kindness, attention and affection in our friendships, we offer love that transforms, love that lives out the mark of God upon us, the greatest love that is real, and always says, "You've got a friend in me." Amen.