

Love in all shapes and sizes

John 20: 19-31

This morning we begin a new series pondering how movies, the Oscar nominated ones this year, help us to hear anew the good news. Now like all well written monster movies, *The Shape of Water* helps us to see the humanity in the strange and the wondrous and the monstrous behaviour of men and women in the world. The narrator of the story introduces it in this way; after wondering if it's a love story or monster movie the narrator says, "Perhaps I'll just warn you about the truth of these facts, this story. It is a tale of love and loss and the monster who tried to destroy it all." And he is not speaking about the odd sea monster who can survive for short times out of the water. He is not speaking about the woman who cannot speak. He is not speaking about the neighbour, the man who fell in love with a man. He is not even speaking about the Russian spy and it's a Cold War movie! These, all of these, are humans, fully and amazingly complex, trying to be good in the midst of a world that's full of secrets and lies.

The true monster in the movie is also a human, a man, but instead of striving to find out truth and to be in relationship he is striving to fit a mold, the mold of a strong, successful person. He strives to follow orders, strives to keep the secrets secret, to keep the enemies, enemies. He tries to be a machine in a way. He wants to be untouched by the mysteries of life and science. He wants to be unaffected even when he is injured by a sea creature; he wraps it up in gauze and pretends he is unaffected by its pain and soon, its smell. It is he in the movie that denies his humanity by denying his connection to the other creatures and humans. He ends lives and relationships instead of striving to nurture them.

Like many other movies by Guillermo Del Toro, this movie reminds us that what is initially monstrous is actually probably a creature we just haven't had lunch with yet. In this movie the magic of both connection and love happen because two people realize they both love hard boiled eggs and they share them. And the love that happens in that relationship bubbles over and transforms other lives.

The Gospel of John this morning brings us a story of Thomas. But in doing so it brings us a story where it asks us to see the humanity in this doubting disciple; to see the humanity, even in the betraying Judas, in the denial of Peter the rock, in the initial disbelief of Mary when she meets the risen Christ. The narrator of the Gospel of John also introduces us to his story. He is going to tell us of the life, death and mysterious resurrection of a man but he wants us to know this is not a

small story, this is a cosmic story and so he begins his entire gospel, not with “one day there was a man named Jesus,” but with this: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God and all things came into being through Him. Without Him not one thing came into being and what has come into being; life and the Light of the people.

And just like a good movie the gospel then unfolds into this story of actual human beings. It is not the traditional hero story. There are sick people who make themselves well because of their faith. There are women whose names we don't get so we just call them all 'Mary'; women who changed the minds of other disciples and of Jesus himself. We discover a community that becomes so inclusive of people that soon people outside that culture and context want to a part of it. And with the inclusions of more and more people (at what literally starts as a dining room feast) becomes a religion that changes the world.

But there are also monsters in our story of faith.

All followers of Jesus have good intentions, but like many, many (all of?) us, they wish that the world was just a little more ordered, a little more controlled, that hard questions would have easy and simple answers that someone would give us. And so this dining room table faith, these followers of a mysterious Christ turn themselves into an ordered, hierarchical institution where it becomes very clear how to become a successful person. Follow orders. Keep secrets, secrets. Categorize people as saved, safe *and* not saved, not safe.

Our faith tradition has sometimes tried to create a mold of a good person and anyone not fitting the mold of the most powerful person in the room, whoever that be, was excluded; is excluded. And when we see ourselves in that part of the Church, which I have myself, I sometimes forget where Jesus is in all that. And then I remember my favorite joke.

One day a very “high up” past Moderator of the United Church of Canada goes to Heaven and looks around and says, “Good gravy, how did all of *those* people get in?” And St. Peter says, “I know, I know, I'm in charge of the front gate. I should do a better job. But really Jesus keeps letting them over the back fence.” If you think you are in a club in a room and the doors are closed, there is a likely possibility that Jesus isn't with you. He's outside.

He's got some hard boiled eggs and he's put out the picnic table and anyone who wants to join him can; even the vegans. He has to learn about vegans, he doesn't know about that, so then he would have to figure out something else to serve other than eggs, but he would. He would.

Our Gospel stories, and the letters that follow them in the Bible, remind us that anything that is easily defined and categorized as 'monstrous,' is actually created by God and is amazing. I don't know if you have ever been called monstrous, but I am sure all of us have had an experience of someone telling us why we were not complete or why we did not fit in.

And God says, “No. You are fully whole and I adore you.” And among us and outside these doors there are Thomas-es walking around. They’ve heard the message and they are like, “Yeah, it sounds good, but I don’t believe you.” And until they feel your actions in the world, until they hear you invite them to lunch or to church, they aren’t going to really believe it.

Guillermo Del Toro has written many a book and made many a movie and all of them have monsters. (I would actually suggest calling me if you want to do a series, and watch all of his movies, and I can let you know which ones maybe not to watch.) In these movies, it is never the monster that’s scary. I promise you that. I am going to read two lines from the movie now. One is a woman talking about a beloved sea creature and I believe very much describes how Jesus sees you and I.

“When he looks at me, the way he looks at me, he does not know what I lack or how I am incomplete. He sees me for what I am as I am and he’s happy to see me every day, every time.”

And a prayer; a prayer found in the script. “Unable to perceive the shape of you (oh Holy God), I find you all around me, your presence fills my eyes with your love and it humbles my heart - for you are everywhere.’

May we all go out and be the evidence of the risen Christ in the world.

Amen.