

Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Welcome back to our Lenten sermon series where we use your picks for favorite Disney movies as sermon illustrations.

#7 was *Moana*

#6 *Beauty and the Beast*

#5 we're saving for the Maundy Thursday service

#4 was the subject of last week's sermon, *Mary Poppins*.

And today at #3:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zn_qirpdBag

:35 - 1:04 and then 4:00 - 4:32

The Lion King was released in 1994, and so you need to know that this sermon is loaded with spoilers. On the surface, *The Lion King* is a movie that animates and provides a musical score to the triumphs and tribulations of being part of the food chain in the Pride Lands of Africa.

A deeper look, and there are strong themes of family and coming-of-age and the circle of life as applied to humanity, not just animals. Any of us with parents who adored us and supported us recognize the precocious and youthfully innocent confidence of a young Simba as he belts out *I Just Can't Wait to be King*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_N5iaMHgKU

1:09 - 1:36

Simba's unearned confidence gets him into trouble, of course. It usually does. That, too is part of the circle of life. The hope is that we grow out of it, with as little damage done on us and those around us as possible.

I was once sharing the challenges of my first job out of college and how my boss clearly didn't understand me or what I was trying to accomplish. One of my colleagues asked me how easy I had been to work with, and thankfully with some years under my belt, I was able to admit I was most likely terrible to work with because I was right out of college, so of course, I knew everything already.

I know the Circle of Life means *we are dust and to dust we will return...* but I also think the Circle of Life reflects our attitudes and experiences that challenge us and push us - and if we are willing - they change us and make us wiser and more open-minded and more importantly, open our hearts. Even though we know, the more we open our hearts, the more likely we are to be hurt.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is often quoted at weddings:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

A lot of couples ask to skip the next few verses. In some ways that makes sense. Their young souls and relationship aren't in that place in the Circle of Life yet. Really, verses 11 through 13 should be saved for the renewal of vows, 10 or more years later:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:11-13).

One interpretation of that text is that the Apostle Paul is speaking of our knowledge of God becoming fulfilled when we transition from life in the Earthly Kingdom to life in the Eternal Kingdom. But certainly throughout our time in **this** realm, we can shed light on what we used to see dimly; leave behind our childish ways.

There is a lot of pain, grief, anger, and hatred in this world. Many of us, because of where we live and how we present, don't need to engage in those things at all. Sometimes, when we ignore the pain our neighbors are going through, we think that's keeping the shadows out and away. Focus on the positive, right? Respect everyone's right to have an opinion... that means no worries, for the rest of your days... I feel like there might be a phrase for that problem free... philosophy...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAoCYwefq1A>

2:51 - 3:19

As Christians, as human beings, we are called to a deeper understanding of the world and our role in it. God asks us to let the light in and to put an end to our childish ways. This means engaging in life and all of its challenges; holding onto the Circle of Life as tight as we can, refusing to close ourselves off from the suffering of others just because it feels too fraught for our own hearts and it's easier to skip over their pain.

This means we keep the phrase "China Virus" from ever crossing our mind, let alone our lips, and we must also call out others around us when they use that despicable phrase or ones like it. Major cities report close to a 150% increase in hate crimesⁱ against the AAPI (Asian

Americans and Pacific Islanders) community. More than statistics though, if you have an Asian person in your life, they can most likely tell you from their own accounts that although nasty looks and being yelled at don't count in the official statistics, there has definitely been an increase in those as well.

Putting an end to our childish ways means naming the places where the church wraps things up tightly in sin language, not to protect, but to control; to make sure that women mind their place and boys and men are told that any flaws in themselves are the fault of others.

The world is calling us to do better. The world needs us to do better. So many of us at MPC have power in the system - because of our gender, because of our whiteness, because of our orientation - and the world is begging us to not skip over the scary parts just because we can.

As you know, Disney has a reputation in their movies for killing off one or more parents. Usually this happens in the beginning (see: *Finding Nemo*, *Frozen*). In *Beauty & the Beast* and *Cinderella* it happens before the story begins. But in *The Lion King* >>>SPOILER ALERT<<< It is the pivotal plot point found smack dab in the middle of the movie. As a parent of a young child, you have to remember to skip over that section.

One night, I was making dinner and I put in *The Lion King* DVD for a 3 or 4 year old Will and I lost track of the movie, until all of the sudden I heard a little voice from the living room couch say, "Mommy...?"

I'd forgotten to skip over the scary part. And it was too late. We sat together and I explained what was happening and we cried (because it is very sad), and admittedly, I thought to myself, "What the heck Disney; why did you have to go there?"

Our lives, too, go to places we don't want them to go. And when it happens, there's no great animator in the sky to blame... or is there? Are we allowed to do that? Are we allowed to say, "What the heck God, why did you have to go there?"

I think we are.

The Psalm Pat read earlier is written by someone who has clearly been making their way around the Circle of Life, and they absolutely have a word or two for the Creator:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

The Psalmist is angry, hurt, forsaken - and cautiously trusting that there is reason to be hopeful.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72pFhJMloFw>

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, when we tell the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem, with the crowd waving palm branches and shouting, “HOSANNA!”

But >>>SPOILER ALERT<<< There is a really scary part that even Jesus tried to skip over.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus *threw himself to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me...”* (Matthew 26:39).

And then, after Jesus is nailed to the cross, he doesn’t thank God for the opportunity to go through this trying time. No. He cries out:

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?!

Crying out against pain and not just to, but against the very God who created us in God’s image is not just righteous – it’s prayer. It even has a name. It’s called lament.

The Circle of Life has some incredibly painful edges; and part of that Circle of Life is learning and maturing and growing even when those lessons hurt.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQd22F5onyM>
3:52- 4:52

Racism exists.

Deep hate and disrespect for women exists.

Fear wielded by pastors and politicians and pundits to manipulate us for their financial gain and power exists.

We can’t skip over any of those parts.

On a more individual level – death and grief and fear and horrible diagnosis and divorce and loss... they too are a part of the Circle of Life. And we can’t skip those parts either.

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.* Psalm 13:5-6

God has Called us to engage in this world, to reflect God’s light where we can, to make the choice to not just stay engaged in the story, but to become a part of it, to make the world a better place for all of God’s Creation.

God promises us, not skipping the bad – will bring all the more joy to the good.

In the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4byjLleS5Y>
1:42 – 2:10

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-increased-nearly-150-2020-mostly-n-n1260264>