

The Gospel in Disney: #4 - *Hunchback of Notre Dame*
Using Adam Hamilton, COR

PP#1: *Image for the movie Hunchback of Notre Dame either or both the 1923 and 1939 versions.*

This summer I took my family to a couple of the Thursday night fright night movies at the local theater. One of the nights my kids got their first ever experience of an old silent film, the 1923 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* starring Lon Chaney. I grew up with the 1939 remake starring Charles Laughton as Quasimodo and Maureen O'Hara as Esmeralda. One of the scenes that has been burned in my memory was when after Quasimodo was whipped, and everyone else was laughing at him, Esmeralda came and gave him a drink of water. For the rest of the movie, Quasimodo, who in the 1939 version seemed to be both mentally and physically handicapped, kept trying to help Esmeralda, saying, "She gave me water. She gave me water."

PP#2: Sermon Series: The Gospel in Disney - *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

Sermon #4: "She Gave Me Water"

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." -Proverbs 31:8-9

And that's what I'm taking for my sermon title today. The Gospel in Disney, the Hunchback of Notre Dame. "She Gave Me Water." "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." -Proverbs 31:8-9

Disney kept this same moving scene in their remake in 1996. We're using Disney animated classics to help us see biblical truths for our lives. Disney, like all good art, speaks to the human condition, illustrates how we are as humans, and what we might become. The Bible reveals God's response to our condition, and tells us His plan for how we can become all that we are created to be.

PP#3: *Images of Victor Hugo's books Notre-Dame de Paris (known in English as The Hunchback of Notre Dame) (1831), and Les Misérables (1862).*

The story itself comes from Victor Hugo's 1831 classic novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*, or in English, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. By the way, he also wrote *Les Misérables* in 1862. Well, it's set in medieval Paris, centered around the gothic cathedral *Notre Dame*. The name is Latin for "Our Lady," referring to Mary. Many of the cathedrals in France, strong Roman Catholics, were dedicated to Mary, and are called *Notre Dame*.

PP#4: *Image of Disney's movie The Hunchback of Notre Dame.*

Well, Disney took up this story and made the most Christian of all Disney films. They worked a lot with the cathedral, the stained glass, the images of light and dark, prayers, songs of worship, faith.

The story begins in 1482 at the cathedral. Some Roma people, who were called Gypsies, were taking a severely deformed baby to the cathedral. The city judge, Frollo, who is supposed to be such a great man of the church, but actually is corrupt, power-hungry, and controlling, has made it his personal campaign to drive out all the Gypsies. Well, he chases after one of the women and in his zeal, accidentally kills her. The cathedral archbishop, who sees all this, sentences Judge Frollo to care for the baby to make atonement for his crimes.

Well, the next scene is 20 years later, with Quasimodo now grown up. Quasimodo is Latin for half/quasi and formed/modo. Frollo has kept Quasimodo at the cathedral, where he became the bellringer. Frollo provided his food and clothing, but all the while telling him he was a freak, a monster, and that he had to stay in the bell tower. So, he believed he was a monster.

Well, our first clip is when Quasimodo brought Esmeralda to the bell tower. It's from a scene later in the movie, but you see the exchange about his identity. Is he really a monster, like Frollo said?

Video Clip: The Hunchback of Notre Dame - Monster Lines & Escape

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m4Y8D0BIoc>

1:26 out of 3:18 minutes (stop it after the gargoyles say "Frollo's nose is long and he wears a truss.")

PP#5: "She Gave Me Water" [Reese, there will be 4 of these.]

1. Who is the monster and who is the man?

Esmeralda is a Gypsy, who Frollo says are bad people. But is she? Frollo calls him a monster, but is he, really? He may be deformed on the outside, but we see that as a person he is kind, courageous, gentle, stands up for others.

Frollo looks like a Christian, a man of high standing in the city and the church. But his character is corrupt. So, here we have the main question of the story: Who is the monster, and who is the man?

Frollo, it seems, is based on the self-righteous Pharisees and Jewish leaders in New Testament. They look righteous in their appearance, but their hearts are selfish. Jesus called them hypocrites, a word from the Greek theater meaning play acting. They don't do what they do because they mean it, they just act it out to look good.

PP#6: Luke 18:9-14

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

Then, in Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told a parable against them. "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

In the movie, Frollo prays exactly like the self-righteous person from Jesus' parable.

Video Clip: “The hunchback Of Notre Dame Hellfire English (Disney)”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NP-RsRGzVo>

1:00 out of 3:33 minutes (stop after he says, “vulgar, weak, licentious crowd” and the scene sweeps down below the cross and onto the fireplace)

PP#7: “She Gave Me Water”

1. Who is the monster and who is the man?
2. We all have the self-righteous monster inside of us

Frollo represents the worst in religious people...pastors, leaders, Christians, who can become so self-righteous, look down on others, think themselves better. It is religion gone bad.

But we all have this in us! I am a recovering Pharisee! We have that tendency to start ranking ourselves above others because we don't do those things, get caught into those things, behave those ways. It happens when we don't notice. We start to look down on what my friend calls “the great unwashed.”

Disney shows Frollo's obsession with driving out the Gypsies, going so far as to purge them out by killing them if needed. He called them “vermin,” insects. Adolf Hitler also called the Gypsies “vermin.” Besides killing over six million Jews, he had a half a million Roma people murdered, too.

All done in the name of religion. This pride can lead to such awful things.

Who is the monster? Who is the man? Man is kind, courageous, stands up for others, truly righteous, caring. A monster destroys, even in the name of his faith!

We all have this monster inside, a desire to rank others lower, put them beneath us, to hurt them.

PP#8: *Image of Cain killing/killed Abel.*

The Bible calls this sin. We see it right after the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve's two sons quarrel...over religion of all things! Ranking...who is better? And Cain kills Abel. A couple of chapters later, at the story of Noah and the ark, the Bible says that the heart of humans was violent and perpetually violent. Sin is destroying. God creates and builds up. Sin tears down.

Now, one of the masterful moves of the Disney movie is how they portray this ranking, this hurting, this violence inside each of us, can move from an individual to a whole group. It's contagious, it spreads like fire. Watch in this clip how the people in the crowd go from laughing with Quasimodo, to shocked at the violence done to him, to joining in and making it worse. It spreads.

Video Clip: Humiliation & Esmeralda's speech (First 1:14 minutes only)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHcH03-9OA>

1:14 out of 2:02 minutes (pause after Frollo says, “A lesson needs to be learned here.”)

The crowd quickly and easily slides into joining into the violence.

When I was in grade school, I remember vividly an awkward girl with glasses. Her name was Shanella Hougan. She had eyes that wobbled. I sort of considered her my friend. Well, one day, a bunch of boys had cornered her on the playground. They were teasing her about her eyes, calling her stupid and a loser. I walked over to see what the crowd was all about. I froze. Here she was, being mocked and laughed at. But I didn't do anything. I just stood there. I was so scared of everyone turning on me, too.

I've had my Shanella Hougan moments many times after that. We have them as adults. A coworker is badmouthed. We say nothing. A neighbor crabs about another. We do nothing. We overhear side comments about other people at the store. We keep right on going. A slur against someone who is not white is spoken at the coffee shop. We keep drinking our coffee.

Now we may not be so brash as to pray Frolo's prayer, but standing around silent while terrible things happen is just as bad. We need to speak out and say, "This isn't right!"

And the amazing thing is that in cases like this, one person speaking up, one person standing up, can make a huge difference. How I have wanted to go back to Shanella Hougan and tell everyone to shut up. When someone does, others who are frozen scared can also voice, "This isn't right!"

In the movie, Esmeralda stands up.

Video Clip: Humiliation & Esmeralda's speech (continue playing the rest of the clip)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHcH03-9OA>

0:46 out of 2:02 minutes

She gave him water. And it changed him.

Throughout the Bible we see a God who is concerned about those who are small, pushed down, overlooked, persecuted, victimized.

PP#9: Psalm 72:12-14

12 For God will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.

13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.

14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in His sight.

Psalm 72:12-14: "For God will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in His sight."

And this God calls His people to speak up.

PP#10: Proverbs 31:8-9

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Proverbs 31:8-9, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

This monster is in all of us. We put others below ourselves. We say things that hurt. Or, we stand there, silent.

PP#11: "She Gave Me Water"

1. Who is the monster and who is the man?
2. We all have the self-righteous monster inside of us
3. We all have the other-helper [hu]man inside of us

But the Bible also reminds us that each of us has Esmarelda inside of us, too. We can be bold and courageous. We can be the man...or, in biblical terms, fully human, when we stand up for what is right.

Not long ago I was in part of a conversation. Rude comments were made about a politician. Another person in the group said, “We should still respect those in power like we would anyone else.” It completely changed the whole tone of the conversation.

But it caught me. Why hadn’t I said it? I committed next time to be the one who said it first.

This is a gospel charge. Look at others as valuable. Speak out against belittling them. Be the first to jump in and say, “This isn’t right.” Stand with the least, the lost, the left out. I want to be that person. I want to be the one who gives him water.

The movie shows a prayer time in the cathedral. Esmeralda is praying for her people, and in the background, the religious people pray. Their prayers are for their own benefits, bounty, blessings. And the scene captures well how the outcast prays a godly prayer, while the religious people pray selfish prayers.

Video Clip: “God Help The Outcasts”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEEpavnk7Uw>

2:41 minutes

How often our prayers sound like those people. Bless me. Make me better. Help me out. Give me more.

Now, this isn’t always bad. We are biblically charged to pray for ourselves. To some degree, your relationship with God is about you. You need a personal relationship with Jesus, where your sins are forgiven, where you receive abundant life, and where your future becomes glory.

But if this is all the farther you get, you don’t have a real relationship with Jesus. You’re stuck in narcissism. This is that monster inside of us again! And our religion can become another outlet for our narcissism. Jesus is all about me, blessing me, making my life better.

But this Jesus, in the Bible, calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. That means taking *and giving*. That means loving ourselves *and others as ourselves*.

PP#12: *Image of Jesus physically touching the leper of Mark 1:41 to heal him, subtitled,* “Jesus was filled with compassion. He reached out His hand and touched the man.” -Mark 1:41

In the very first chapter of Mark, Jesus heals a man with leprosy. Now, many times Jesus healed people without ever touching them. But this time, with a leper—one who everyone avoided—Jesus reached out and touched him.

Quasimodo is like this leper. And Esmarelda reached out and touched him. And then, throughout the rest of the story, Quasimodo reached out to touch, and heal, and help, her.

Jesus’ followers are to be His hands and His voice. We stand up—stand with—when no one else will. We speak up when no one else will. We reach out and touch whom no one else will.

PP#13: “She Gave Me Water”

1. Who is the monster and who is the man?
2. We all have the self-righteous monster inside of us
3. We all have the other-helper [hu]man inside of us
4. We live for ourselves and for others

Frollo is the real monster, and Quasimodo and Esmeralda are the real man. Both are in us. Again, right now, let's choose the man. Let's commit to live into the people God created us to be: to be His voice, His hands, His heart...to a world filled with people wondering if they are worth it.

Let's live this week in a way so others will say about us, "She gave me water!"

Amen.