

Series: The Gospel in Disney

Sermon #1: *The Lion King*

Scriptures: Genesis 49:9-10, 1 Peter 5:8 & Rev. 5:5

Video Clip: Opening of *The Lion King* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwSKkKrUzUk>
3:48 minutes. Can start at 50 seconds.

PP#1: The Gospel in Disney - *The Lion King*

Remember Who You Are

Rev. 5:5 "... 'See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed....'"

Our fall sermon series: The Gospel in Disney. Not the Gospel *according to* Disney. No, it is the Gospel according to Jesus Christ, but as illustrated, as glimpsed, in Disney animated classics.

Disney has a way of connecting with all of us, resonating with who we are, what we are experiencing, and what we yearn for. So we're going to take a few weeks and look at some Disney animated classics—yes, right down to *Frozen*—to see how our faith in Jesus speaks to our current situation.

I'm drawing upon the work of the Rev. Adam Hamilton, the pastor at the Church of the Resurrection, a United Methodist Church in Kansas City, who crafted this series, and we're using some of his ideas, like the inserts that you can take with you and use all week long. Take them out.

"Remember Who You Are." *The Lion King* originally came out in 1994, and that year it was the highest grossing film of the year. It earned two Oscars, one for the sound track made by Elton John and Tim Rice. It was the highest grossing animated film—just shy of a billion dollars!—until 2010, when *Toy Story 3* surpassed it. It still holds third place, with *Frozen* now at the top.

The movie's magic—like all good art—is because it speaks to the human condition, our condition. The Gospel, then, is God's *response* to our human condition—God's response to us.

The opening scene, where the new lion prince, named Simba, is consecrated and presented to the community, reminds me of baptism—especially with that beam of light breaking through the clouds. Perhaps we can see Jesus in Simba, with the Magi coming to worship Him. Did you know that in the Bible, Jesus is called the King and the Lion? Or perhaps in Simba we can see ourselves. We are born with a purpose, an identity, a destiny. Perhaps it reminds us of both Jesus and ourselves.

PP#2: *Image of Mufasa and Simba*

In the first part of the movie, it is story of father and son: King Mufasa (voiced by the deep-throated James Earl Jones) and his son, Simba. The father is trying to raise his son in wisdom and leadership, wanting to equip him to some day be able to live into his destiny.

You know, school has started. We're kid-focused again. And this has got me thinking. My kids are in the next grades. They're growing up. How are they doing...I mean where it really matters? Am I parenting them right? What do they need, for growing...not just physically, or emotionally, or in education...but in character, personality, in their identity? Do they know who they are? Do they know that God created them for a purpose, for a destiny? Do I remind them of that...enough...in ways that form them? Are they growing up into it? How do you shape that?

PP#3: *Image of Mufasa and Simba, subtitled, "Who do they need you to be?"*

Well, how were you shaped? How did you come to embrace who you were created to be? If your parents helped you do that, how did they? This movie reminds us that in reality, our kids don't do what we say...they do what we do. They learn from watching us.

Don't we usually get that backwards? We like to say, "Do what I say, not what I do!" But then they do what we do, and not necessarily what we say. So, as you're thinking about how you are shaping those that God has given under your influence, think first about what you do. What do they see you doing? What do you look like when they see you at your worst? You know, lately, I've been thinking about the difference between what I say to my kids that they should do, and what I model. Even something like how I resolve disagreements with my wife. And then I expect them to behave different, better, at school with others? This fall, as we are again kid-focused, let's go to our heavenly Father and ask Him to help us be who our kids need us to be. Let's make that our daily prayer, starting today. Every morning, before you talk with your kids, talk with your heavenly Father. Ask Him to make you whom they need you to be. OK?

Well, when Mufasa shows Simba the extent of their kingdom, he tells his son explicitly not to go into the elephant graveyard. Of course, Simba disobeys and goes there. What he didn't know, was that this is where the hyenas lurked. He and his friend get into a mess, and they're almost eaten. Luckily he is rescued by his dad. But then comes "the talk."

Video Clip: Mufasa teaches Simba after the elephant graveyard

2:09 minutes @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw45nBcWnbQ>

PP#4: *Image of Mufasa having "the talk" with Simba.*

As parents who follow Jesus, we first come to know that we are children of God, and then we help our kids see that they, too, are children of God. It is our job to shape our kid's identity as God's children. We must continually remind them that they are *our* kids, yes, but more than that: that they are *God's* kids, too. They need to remember who they are! 1 John 3:1 "See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are!" We need to model that they are a child of God.

Mufasa is trying to shape Simba's identity. Godly parents are to try to shape their kid's identity. We see that in the Bible.

PP#5: Genesis 49:9-10

"You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son.

Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."

Let's go back to the first book of the Bible. Did you know that the Lion King is a biblical idea? In the Bible, the promised messiah-king is called a lion. And, in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, King Aslan—a Jesus figure—is a lion!

Well, it goes back to Jacob in Genesis. Jacob is Abraham's grandson; and Jacob had 12 sons. One of them was Joseph, with the coat of many colors. And, when Jacob is nearing death, he calls in his 12 sons and proclaims a blessing over each of them. He gives them each a word, a description, an identity. It seems that God inspired these blessings, because they all came true. Well, when he gets to his fourth son, Judah, he breaks out into this word.

Reader: Genesis 49. You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son.

Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."

Jacob calls Judah a lion. And then, he says that the septer—the royal line—will always be with his descendants. And he even goes so far as to say that all the nations would obey a special king!

Now back then, they didn't know what that meant. There would be no kings among those people for nearly 1,000 years. But finally, when David is king—the greatest king the Hebrews ever knew—the people wondered: could this now be the fulfillment of Jacob's ancient prophecy? But still, the nations didn't obey him. There must still be a greater one coming. And this prophecy gets linked to the Messiah who is to come, so by another 1,000 years later, by time of the New Testament, the people are still waiting for this Messiah-king.

Then, in the last book of the Bible, which shows the end times, again the Lion King appears. John the Apostle is having his vision, and in it the elders gather around the heavenly throne, praising the king, and tell John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has become totally victorious.

PP#6: Revelation 5:5

"Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'"

Reade: Revelation 5:5 "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'"

Jesus is the foretold Lion of the tribe of Judah, a descendant of King David, and even greater king than he. He wins victory over sin and death by dying on the cross, and at the end times, all nations do obey Him. He is the victorious Lion King!

PP#7: *Image of young Simba and Scar*

Well, in the movie, the later part is about Simba and Scar. Scar represents the dark side. He is Mufasa's brother. And he wants to become king. So, he devises a plot to kill both Simba and Mufasa.

Scar seems to also represent the dark side in each of us: jealousy, coveting, power, control, status. We are supposed to be scared of Scar, partly because we also see him in ourselves.

The Bible calls this our sin nature. We are, deep down, selfish. We are each drawn to it, and it is scary, because being selfish draws us to those things that hurt not only ourselves but even those we love. It makes no sense. But, it's true, you stop thinking when you are drawn to sin. Making sense doesn't matter any more. It has an appetite all of its own.

Just read about the Ferguson, Missouri, shooting. There is hate and anger and selfishness all over that one. Look in the background! People came in from out of town, snuck in behind the demonstrators, used them as a cover, and looted the shops and started riots. Wow.

When we think of evil, we think of Stalin and Hitler. They killed to have power. And in the movie, there is a scene of Scar commanding the hyenas, who are marching in goose-step like Nazis. In the Bible it is Satan who leads it. He was the first to give into the selfishness and rebel against God. And—are you ready for this?—in the Bible, Satan is also represented as a lion!

PP#8: 1 Peter 5:8

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

1 Peter 5:8 warns the Christians, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

And that is well represented in the movie. Scar sets up the plot. He has Simba wait in a cavern. Then, he sends the hyenas to get the water buffalo to stampede through that cavern. He tells Mufasa that Simba is in trouble, and when Mufasa rescues him, Scar flips Mufasa back into the stampede, where he is trampled to death. Now, Scar wanted them both dead, but he takes advantage of the situation and tells Simba it was all his fault, and tells him to run away and never come back.

Video Clip: Scar has Simba run away.

1 minute. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiM3dv7JoYU>

PP#9: *Image of Simba and Scar with Mufasa dead.*

The word “devil” means slanderer. The word “satan” means accuser. Revelation says that Satan accuses us. He tells us that it is all our fault...that our sin is just so great...that God could never love us...that we could never be forgiven. This is the great lie of Satan! And so, when we give into the selfishness, the darkness inside, we then have to run away. We run away from who we are. We run away from God’s plan for our lives, our destiny, who we were created to be.

And when Simba runs away, Scar takes over the pride lands. He gets what he wanted. But he rules so badly that everything is thrown out of balance, and the lands are slowly destroyed.

PP#10: *Image of Simba, Timon and Pumba*

Well, out in the wilderness, Simba is adopted by two care-free critters, a meerkat named Timone, and a warthog named Pumba. They teach Simba that the way to survive is to simply forget all that is past. Live in the present, and don’t care about anything. Their catchphrase is, what, church? *Hakuna Matata*. It means “no worries.” And so, Simba forgets where he came from, who he was, and all his family and responsibilities back home. He deals with his guilt by not worrying about it.

This is the phrase that the Prodigal Son lived by, in Jesus’ story. He simply forgot about all his past. But eventually, the emptiness inside becomes too much to ignore. Same with the movie. The family back home are living in despair, and one of them discovers Simba by accident and reaches out to him for help. His past caught up with him. Now, Simba has a choice to make.

Video Clip: Simba remembers who he is.

3:16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7fXfCZ4sB4>

PP#11: *Image of Simba approaching Pride Rock in the distance.*

We are like Simba. We forget who we are. We may even reject who we are. We live in the moment, hoping to forget all that guilt that has piled up on us. But the emptiness inside becomes too much.

You are God's child. God has a claim on you. Even if you ignore or reject it, God has a purpose and destiny for you. You will only be whole if you live into it. Running away can be so painful. It can be so empty. *Hukuna matata* only works for a while.

Remember that you are a child of God! You are called for a purpose. There is a greater plan for your life. Remember who you are! And keep remembering. Every day. Remind yourself. Every time you shower, every time you bath, I want you to remember that you are baptized. I want you to say to yourself, "Remember who you are!" You are a child of God. You have a greater identity!

Every time you shower, remember you belong to God. Every morning, talk to your heavenly Father before you talk to your kids. Then pray that into your kids, too. Every time you tell them to shower, tell them to remember...remember who they are!

Simba goes back. He confronts his fears and guilt. It is hard, and a battle ensues. But we know how it ends. That's why we like movies like this. We want it to end that way.

PP#12: Revelation 7:16-17

16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Well, it does in real life, too. In Revelation, at the end of time, it says the real Lion King will come back, defeat the lion of evil, and put everything right. Revelation says, "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb—[the image of the Lion King has turned unto the Lamb King]—for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is our promise. This is our destiny. This is our future.

So, does that help change things *now* for you?

PP#13: *Image of adult Simba, Nala, Rafiki and their new baby on Pride Rock.*

Do you invest in kids? Has God placed kids in your life? Then be sure to help shape their God-given identity.

How about that inner Scar that you struggle with? It leads to pain and destruction. And it calls you away from who you are created to be. Stop forgetting! Remember who you are! You are a child of the One True God! You are a child of the Eternal King!

And no matter what you are walking through right now, know that it will not be that way forever. In the end, the Lion King wins!

Pray with me: 1) God forgive me for how we have walked away

2) I want to be your child

3) Use me, I offer my life to you.