

Lent 4 Hosea 5:15–6:2 Romans 8:1–10 Matthew 20:17–28
March 26, 2017 Hymns: 99, 486, 713, 376

The latest blockbuster Disney movie is not by any means a ‘Christian’ movie. For Beauty and Beast, parental guidance is suggested – even necessary for parents concerned about what their children learn. This story definitely reveals important truths about humanity, our natural state and our need for love. The prince is arrogant. Gaston is a narcissist. Maurice steals. Even Belle is discontent and must escape in literature. There is no shortage of sin in the movie. The spell that makes the prince into Beast resembles the depravity of humanity trapped in the sinful nature. The enchantress brings on the punishment for sin of all wrong is not rectified before the last petal of life falls off the rose. What else is the punishment than hell? The enchantress even brings the Beast back from the dead! The movie presents ‘Love’ as the magical power to set all things right.

A beauty of a story, magnificent cinematography, exhilarating music – I’d give Beauty and Beast 4.5 stars out of 5. Then I walk out of the theater and wonder if Belle and the Prince will still be living happily ever after in a few years when arrogance and discontentment resurface. The prince cannot be rescued eternally by Belle, or even by Agathe, the enchantress. If life is sought in human love, it will fail. When people look for life, there is a fundamental error in thinking that my love and another’s love can change everything. The beauty of love is that – to really know what love is – you must know God, whose love is greater than all the world. In Romans 8, do you see **The Beauty that Gives Life**?

1. Seeing God’s Work in Christ (1–4)

Immediately before the words of our text, Paul the Apostle rightly recognized how empty of love he was by nature. *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what it is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... What a wretched man I am! Who rescues me from the body of death?* (Ro 7:18-19,24) Do you feel that struggle Paul describes? Is your pet sin (small and unimportant as you like to think it) all too much like the alcoholic who got religion, for a while? You promised to quit. And you did for a while. But when you got the urge, you did it again... exactly the opposite of what you were supposed to do.

So when we talk about a getting rid of sin, and finding beauty in life, don’t look at your love as a powerful **cause** of change in you! Look first to what God has done in Christ. Jesus work is the power. He reveals God’s love. Life is the **result**! I do cry out with Paul, “What a wretched man I am!” But God leads me to also say, *Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Ro 7:25) By our sin we had deserved death. My last rose petal was all but gone. But Jesus answered my every need. By his life, his death, his resurrection, God declared us holy. ¹*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,* ²*because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

Christ our Lord delivered us from the dreaded guilt of sin. The change Jesus brought was first of all a complete reversal of status. Think of it like this: if the government in its vast computer network ever got the idea that you died, it would change everything for you. You would be in the category of – have the legal status of- those who died. This new status would have its advantages. The IRS would not come to you for payment of any debt. If you were obliged to serve time in prison for some crime, no one would ever knock on your door. All that would be over. To them, you are dead. They would not be easily talked out of it.

The law of the Spirit of life effected a change in status for the entire human world through Christ. His punishing death was reckoned by God to be the death of all. Before any attitude change in you, something was spoken about the world in the very throne room of God. “I forgive you.” As far as God is concerned, it’s all over. The condemned world has become the forgiven

world. The guilty world has been declared not guilty for Jesus sake. According to the law, our condemnation has been carried out! The Spirit of life brought me to believe that this is true! There is now no condemnation for me!

We can be sure this is true. ³*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,* ⁴*in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.* No, the law can't bring life. But God can. And God did in sending his Son. He was our sin offering. All those Old Testament sacrifices for sin pointed the one offering that God made for sin. Sin was foreign to Christ, yet God made him to be 'sin for us' that it included his execution for us. Through Christ, the law's required perfection is fully met in us, giving us life!

2. Ready for joyful service (5–10)

This change in status from condemned to forgiven in Christ changes everything. We know who we are. We know whose we are. We have peace. We have hope. We have a future. We have God. Faith in Jesus means that something completely new is written by the Spirit of God at the very bottom of our lives: "I have reconciled you to myself." The Holy Spirit brings us to believe this. This is the life that really is life..

Through the message of Christ, the Holy Spirit renews the whole person. Listen to the tremendous contrasts that Paul describes. ⁵*Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* ⁶*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.* Where our old mind set was nothing but rebellion, hostility and death, the Spirit gives us the desire to live in accordance with the law.

This great change is our everyday life. ⁹*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you...* ¹⁰*If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.* The Christian is no longer controlled by selfish desires of his flesh. The Christian is controlled by the Spirit. Thus the dominant force in our lives is God's will and his desires, and his love. Remember that the change in you is not the cause of your salvation, but the result. This is why the degree of change in you is not the cause of either morbid doubt or foolish pride.

I once heard the entertaining account from a man who spent the first 30 years of his life thinking he was German, then found out he was really Spanish. He described the way this sudden, new fact slowly, strangely worked itself out in his life... until the song he sang in the shower was not "*Du, du liebst mir im Herzen,*" but "*Ay, ay, ay, ay, canta y no llore*". In his words, "Here I thought I was that, come to find out I'm this."

To be a Christian is to wake up to a world of facts. I'm a beast of a sinner. This knowledge is unavoidable. I know I'm **that**. However, in Jesus, I've come to find out that I'm **this** – I am a child of the Creator-God, a soul bound for his glory, and object of such love I can scarcely take it in. He calls me beauty! This truth is ever unfolding, revealing, and working itself out in my life.

Practically speaking, the Gospel lesson for today gives us the synopsis of this new self, this new attitude – service. That selfishness and arrogance of Zebedee's sons and their mother has no place here. We have been called to be of service, "*Just as the Son of Man (our Lord and Savior) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mt 20:28). Look next to you. There is someone to serve. Look at your neighbor's home, across your desk at work, in that hospital bed across the street. There is someone to serve! And you have good news to share! You have love from God in Christ. Look to what God has done in Christ - *there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* – and you'll be ready for joyful service. Amen.