

Fight From Love

Rev. John Allen

Each year at the Strawberry Festival, I offer in the silent auction the right to choose a topic for one of my sermons.

At last year's Strawberry Festival, Greg and Fahti placed the winning bid.

They asked me to see the movie "Wonder Woman," which had just recently come out, and to preach about whatever themes or ideas emerged for me out of my experience with that movie.

Now don't worry, if you haven't seen Wonder Woman, I will tell you what you need to know for the Sermon. And for those of you who might still want to see it, I will try not to spoil it too much.

When Wonder Woman first came out, many people immediately recognized that the lead character, Diana, (aka Wonder Woman), is as a very Christ-like figure.

She is born in a world separate from ours, she is sent by her mother into this world to save it.

The movie takes place during World War One, a brutal and violent conflict which Diana sees as clearly the work of Aries, the God of War. She sets out into the world of men to confront and destroy Aries and thus bring an end to the violence of the world.

Like Jesus in the wilderness confronting Satan, Diana is tempted by Aries to join him, to use her power to rule over the world, rather than to rescue it.

She refuses and instead fights alongside a group of men, to help stop a major chemical gas attack from being launched on London.

She is a superhero. She deflects machine gun bullets with her shield, leaps tall buildings and large ravines, and saves the men who are fighting along her at every turn.

In many ways, it is like any other superhero movie you might see. Long action sequences, stunning special effects and stunts, a fast-paced story and a dramatic score.

My first clue that Diana was a different sort of Superhero came in a small scene when she and her band are celebrating the day's victory, and a soldier named Charlie who has been with them is playing the piano in the bombed out ruins of a cafe as they all dance.

We first met Charlie earlier in the day clearly suffering from traumatic stress. Unable to fight, frozen in place, petrified. He is haunted by the horror of war. And yet in this moment, he has discovered a glimpse of beauty in the midst of it all, space to make music and joy.

The next morning, as they prepare to set out, Charlie suggests to his friends that it might be best if they leave him behind. "I'm no good," he says. "You are better off without me."

Diana won't hear it, she insists that he stay with them, she is glad to have him as a part of the team. "Besides" she says with a smile, "who will sing for us?"

Like so many veterans in our own world who grapple with PTSD, it would have been so easy for this man to end up isolated. Diana with a simple invitation, reminds him that his value as a person is not tied up in his skill as soldier. There is more to him than his fighting.

She helps persevere the joy that was brought into their lives that evening before. A glimpse of beauty, in the midst of it all.

In moment after moment, Diana learns that the world is not simply good guys and bad guys. She learns that even fearsome warriors have songs in their hearts. And she is disappointed to learn too that those men she has grown to love and trust, sometimes let her down by failing to do the right thing when the moment calls for it.

The film begins with her holding a very simplistic view of the world. That there are good people and bad people. That the world has been corrupted by Aries, and that if she simply destroys him, the world will be a paradise.

Over time, she learns that no one person lies behind the. No single fight can stop it. And that every person is in fact a mix of good and bad. Violence and beauty. War and peace .

The movie ends with her offering a monologue. "I used to want to save the world." She says.

"To end war and bring peace to mankind. But then, I glimpsed the darkness that lives within their light. And I learned that inside every one of them, there will always be both. A choice each must make for themselves. Something no hero will ever defeat. And now I know, that only love can truly save the world. So I stay, I fight, and I give, for the world I know can be."

Diana learns that the world you and I inhabit is complicated.

No hero can strip all the evil out of the world.

Bad things will happen. Some people will choose cruelty.

Only love can truly save the world.

That is to say, that there will always be this force that seems to be tearing us apart, pulling us away from each other, emphasizing difference, stoking fear and hate.

There will always be people who choose evil.

We cannot remove that reality from the world.

So instead we must pull in the opposite direction. We must pull toward each other. Tend to the things that make our hearts beat as one. Strengthen the ties that bind us together as a human people.

We must take this journey too, the journey Diana took, to tend to love, rather than spend our energy trying to scrub evil from the world.

And that tending to love is a sort of battle. But not one waged with bullets and bombs, but one waged by railing against the things that tear us apart.

Not a battle where we risk life and limb, but where we risk being vulnerable, being disappointed, being hurt, losing things that we treasure.

In our reading this morning the Apostle Paul writes: “Don’t owe each other anything but love. For love is the fulfilling of the law.”

This is what we as Christians must always remember. That we do not only fight *for* love, but we fight *with* love. We fight *from* love.

For Christ taught us, and Wonder Woman reminds us, that we face a great struggle in this world against the evil that twists and winds its way into human hearts.

The way we fight it is by weaving love as well into and through our very souls.

The very last lines of the film are Diana's

"So I stay, I fight, and I give, for the world I know can be."

The beauty of this movie is to see her fight.

Not so much when she is bursting through concrete walls and charging headlong at machine guns.

But when she refuses to let the pain of the world be the only thing to see.

This is how we fight from a place of love. By giving our energy to the things in the world that are beautiful, that are healing, that are whole.

By giving our attention to lifting up how the world should be. Rather than pointing out all it's flaws.

By making our own lives an image of the better world we know is possible.

Like when Diana reaches out to Charlie, in a moment of love, to remind him of the beauty of his songs, even when they are standing amongst rubble and ruins.

That too is how she fights. For the world she knows can be."

That too is how we can fight. With love. For the world we believe God desires.