

## “Sex Sells”

Confession time. In spite of the bad newspaper reviews, in spite of friends saying they were disappointed—I went to see “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.” Now I did so because I was sure there had to be a good sermon illustration in there somewhere. So I went for the early afternoon showing (I don’t go at night because, as some have noticed at late night church meetings, I have a tendency to fall asleep). In spite of that I have to confess I nodded off a few times during this movie. I was kept awake by my wife elbowing me and periodic giggles from a gaggle of girls behind me.

In this sixth Harry Potter movie the evil dark lord Voldemort is gaining power so that even Hogwarts is no longer the safe haven it once was. Harry searches for dangers that lie within the castle, but Dumbledore is more intent upon preparing him for the final battle between good and evil. Harry is, after all, the chosen one. Meanwhile, the students are under attack from a very different adversary as teenage hormones rage across the ramparts. A very different enemy indeed.

Sex sells. Whether it be consumer goods or stories—sex sells. And you have to appeal to a broad market. Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter, said in an interview that he tends to have relationships with older women because when he was fifteen, girls his age, didn’t understand that he had to work. It is also reported that he made \$25 million just for the last movie.

Back to the gaggle of giggling girls that sat behind me in the movie. They were laughing at the sex (kissing) scenes in the movie. I didn’t actually see these girls, but I can image three types defined by their ages. The youngest preteens might be those raised on “SpongeBob SquarePants” and giggling is the normal response to anything. Teenage girls have already moved on to the “Twilight” series that has no sexual scenes but sexual tension built into every glance exchanged between human and vampire—perhaps a better way to deal with hormonal tensions that are beyond understanding. The third, group, in their twenties, attend simply for nostalgia—to rekindle memories

of their youth—of the first Harry Potter movie, 12 years ago, when times were simpler and secure.

The stories of King David, the chosen one, should be read in the same way as the Harry Potter series are read. Remember how it all began?

It didn’t begin with Samuel anointing the young shepherd David, the youngest of all the brothers, as the chosen one. It didn’t begin with David killing the giant Goliath with his slingshot. It didn’t begin with David rescuing the ark from the Philistines and his naked victory dance.

It actually began with the people asking the prophet Samuel for a King to rule over them. Samuel tries to talk them out of this and says: “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (1 Samuel 8:11-20 NRSVS)

Our reading for today begins this way. “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent

*Continued on page 2*

*Continued from page 1*

Joab with his officers and all Israel with him... But David remained at Jerusalem.” (2 Samuel 11:1 NRSVS)

So David breaks the first rule. The King is the one who goes out and fights the battles. A slippery slope after that—downhill all the way. He continues with the King type behaviour—he takes. “He can have whatever he wants, no restraint, no second thoughts, no reservations, no justification. He takes simply because he can.” So, he takes Bathsheba (after viewing her sunbathing on a roof) then he takes her husband Uriah’s life (after failing to get him to have sex with his wife to cover up the pregnancy), then he takes her to be his wife. Take, take, take.

Two weeks ago we had Vacation Bible School. For three years I have been one of the Godly Play storytellers. Godly Play is a non-coercive way to encourage children to move into larger dimensions of belief and faith, through wondering questions and open-ended response time. It assumes that children already know about God and don’t need to have the Bible stories interpreted for them because they can connect the stories with their own personal experience of God.

So this year, I have to confess, I broke the rule. I told them what the story might mean. But first let me tell you the whole story about the storytelling.

It began with the story of Jesus healing the paralytic. You remember the story—the friends of the paralyzed man break open the roof of the house where Jesus was staying and lower him down. Jesus heals him and says, take up your bed and walk.

So the wondering questions are: What is your favourite part of the story? What is the most important part of the story? If you were in the story, where would you be?

Now in this class the “just turning teens” girls responded that they would be on the roof sunbathing. At that point I said a silent prayer that went something like this, “Thank you God that I am not telling the story of David and Bathsheba.” I thought of saying “I wonder if you are wearing sunscreen?” or “I wonder what kind of body beautiful image you have already been coerced into believing?” But I didn’t respond, because we need to trust that they are doing their spiritual work based on their own experience.

On the last day we told the story of the women at the empty tomb. Same questions: What is your favourite part of the story? What is the most important part of the story? If you were in the story, where would you be?

One girl spoke up and said, “I would be a speck of dust on the road.” And then in sequential unison each girl said the same—“I would be a speck of dust on the road.” “My God,” I thought. “What kind of self image do these young girls have?” And it was at that point that I broke the rule.

And I said to them. “I wonder, if the point of this story is that in the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, God can in the same way that he did at the beginning of creation, take the specks of dust of the ground and create a living human being—male and female. And then God breathed into them a holy breath and they became living human being, and they were holy beings and God loved them.

And I wonder if this story means that anyone who feels dead in their lives can have new life simply because God loves them very much and the glory of God is to see them fully alive.

And I wonder if this story means that anyone who has travelled down the wrong road and feels lost and alone—that they will be found and God will guide them back to the place of green grace and still waters.

And I wonder if this story means that if you feel like a speck of dust on the road, stepped on by everything in life that seems so much bigger than you, you are still part of God’s story—a story that is over two thousand years old. A story that gives eternal life. Life for you who are now one of God’s chosen ones.

And I pray, in words of Paul who was lifted blind out of the dust, these words “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:16-19 NRSVS)

May it be so for everyone of us.