

## 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: 1 John 2:15-17 The Message

<sup>15-17</sup> Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: 1 John 4:17-21 The Message

<sup>17-18</sup> God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love. <sup>19</sup> We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. <sup>20-21</sup> If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

## The Gospel According to Toy Story

In 1979 a new company called Pixar was formed and its focus was creating computer graphic animation. It started out as a division of Lucasfilm- that brought such blockbusters as Indiana Jones and Star Wars, which included some special effects that were computerized. With time and progress eventually computer animation evolved into a first major movie in 1995 called Toy Story. A movie that was without a doubt a blockbuster hit. It not only offered great animation, but great vocals too by some of our favorite actors. Like Tom Hanks as Woody and Tim Allen as Buzz Lightyear. This kind of success leads to the eventual purchase of Pixar by the Disney Corporation in 2006 for \$7.4 billion. And ever since then Disney and Pixar have released films that not only entertain us, but amaze us with their graphics, and touch our hearts with their stories.

Toy Story is all about a boy named Andy and his toys. The first toy that he really became attached to was Woody. Woody was a cowboy with a pull string in his back that when pulled you heard a recorded saying like *"reach for the sky" or "there's a snake in my boot"*. But one day Andy is celebrating a birthday and he gets a new toy, named Buzz Lightyear. And so the battle begins, who will be Andy's favorite, who is Andy's ultimate go to toy when he chooses one to take to camp. Eventually all four movies will be about who is Woody, what is his role and identity in Andy and his own world. And let's face it, we understand that struggled.

There is not a person in this congregation who at one time or another has not had to question who they are, and where they fit in. We all struggle with this. Am I the person who fits in with this group of peers, or do I fit in with that group. Do I classify as myself as liberal or conservative? Vegetarian or meat lover? Pepsi or coke drinker? Each topic is part of our development, our self-identification. And then, we have to factor in what does it mean to be a Christian – how does that help me define who I am?

Well that is why an elder of the Church wrote this letter, under the name of John, to a Christian community. Trying to help them figure out who they are in the world. And as we look at this letter, we can see some connections with Toy Story and Woody's identity struggles.

Scholars believe this was written no later than 135 CE, which means someone was able to share their personal relationship with the risen Christ, and it was written down as so. And the core of the message simply has to do with revelation of God through Christ. The book begins: <sup>1-2</sup> ***From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.*** <sup>3-4</sup> ***We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!***

In this letter the author is expressing that as Christians, we come to know God when we know Jesus. That is an "experience of communion", it's being claimed by God through Jesus. In Jesus we see God choose us and claim us. Whether we are a tax collector, a young child with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, a confused

teacher of the law, or a hurting woman. God claims each of us. Martin Luther had a daily exercise of putting his hand on his head and saying, “I am baptized” as a reminder of God choosing him, claiming him.

In Toy Story, do you remember how Woody recalls being claimed by Woody? Andy writes his name on Woody’s boot. A gospel lesson we learn from the first Toy Story is: Know who you are, by knowing Whose you are, and who you are, is defined by Who claims you.

In the second Toy Story movie we see Andy is growing up and so Woody is feeling useless, he doesn’t play with him as much, and begins to feel abandoned by Andy. So much so that other options become appealing to him. Like regrouping with the cast of a tv series Woody was created for, a group that could take him to another land, where he will be cherished not by one but by many. At least that is what he is told will happen if he agrees to be sold by this toy owner. The problem is Woody doesn’t realize that this new form of cherishing does not mean he will be played with, but rather become like a trophy. Woody once again is struggling with his identity and role in life. Is it worth it to be Andy’s toy anymore? Or is there another way, a more tempting way to go?

Our first scripture lesson says, <sup>15-17</sup> ***Don’t love the world’s ways. Don’t love the world’s goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him.***

Woody is being tempted by the ways of the world, not the way of Andy. Andy honestly wants Woody back and will search for him, but Woody is so drawn by the temptation for something different for himself, that he doesn’t realize it’s not real. And all it will do is take him further away from his role as Andy’s toy. In fact it will take him half way around the world. So many times this world tempts us to do things that we think may be better for us that we miss out on recognizing it takes us away from being who we are and whose we are. For instance, if we look at the world now, we will see happiness is: Buying and wearing certain jeans or shoes. Having and using the proper cell phone or tablet. Eating certain foods or eating at certain restaurants. Or taking certain medications to enhance our lives. Yet, all those items are temporary. So the Scripture says, ***The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.*** Ultimately Woody recognizes his loyalty is to Andy, and invites the other new toys he has met to join him, in a new way of living. A gospel lesson we learn from Toy Story 2 is: Don’t be tempted by the ways of the world, rather embrace the ways of God that are everlasting.

15 years after the first Toy Story was released, Pixar and Disney produced Toy Story 3. Andy is all grown up, getting ready to leave for college, and so what happens now? The toys are transferred to a pre-school called Sunnyside. But it’s not pretty. Kids banging on them all day, slobbering on them, coloring them. It’s tough times. Well one thing we definitely see is that Woody knows who he is now. He will always know that he is Andy’s toy, *but with that understanding comes an even greater understanding in his role.* Woody now claims the other toys, those he has known for years, those he just met. But some of those toys struggle with his offering of support and let’s face it, love. Because they haven’t been loved in a long time. And they are scared to be loved, even by another toy like Woody.

Our second lesson states this, <sup>17-18</sup> ***God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.***

Fear comes down to the unknown. We don’t know, so we become afraid. We don’t know what will be, we could get hurt again, we could get rejected again, love could fail us. But when we learn that the One who claims us is love, and we believe in that love, we learn to live in that love, that casts out fear. Verse <sup>19</sup> ***We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.***

In the third Toy Story there is this touching scene where the toys accidentally end up in an incinerator, ready to face their demise, and at first there is this scrambling to save themselves, but then all of a sudden there is this calmness, the calmness comes when they take each other’s hands. As if to say, we lived our lives together, we are Andy’s toys, we are loved, and we do not have fear, even to the end, because we have love

together. So that the third lesson we learn from Toy Story is: When you know who you are and Whose you are and you are not tempted to leave that identity, you will have no fear, you will have love to share and hold onto.

In 2019 Pixar released Toy Story 4 and in it we meet Forky. Forky is no ordinary toy; he's a toy made by Bonnie, the little girl in the film who now owns all of Andy's toys. And on her first day in Kindergarten, Forky is the only redeeming feature of that terrifying day for her – her new friend, her companion of her own making out of trash, in a new and scary world of the classroom. So yes, Forky is made from rubbish, and he's not much of a looker. But he comes to life, because Bonnie has made him and loves him. And Woody has to help him understand that. So much so that throughout the movie Forky gets lost, he is constantly trying to go back to where he came from, the trash, and Woody has to constantly seek him out.

The author of this letter of 1 John ends with these words in chapter 5: <sup>13-15</sup> ***My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion. And how bold and free we then become in his presence.*** The author states belief in what God has done for us in Christ, brings the assurance of everlasting life, and with that comes a new way of life that is bold and free. In this movie, Forky eventually learns that with every time he is lost, with every time he throws himself into the trash, he is found, he is found because Woody explains that he is claimed by Bonnie, loved by her, that he's not trash, he's a toy, a toy that boldly gives joy. There are times when we get lost, sometimes we don't recognize it, sometimes we do, we lose ourselves and feel condemned, feel wasted, destroyed. But there is God who seeks us out of the trash time and time again. The one who died for us on Golgatha, a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, only to rise again from a garden near that dump, three days later. And when we know that we are found by that God, what joy we have to give.

So friends, if ever you doubt or question what it means to be a Christian. May the Scripture of 1 John and the inspiring Toy Story movies remind you:

**That to know who you are, is to know Who claims you.**

**To not be tempted by the ways of the world, rather embrace the ways of God that are everlasting.**

**When you know who you are and Whose you are and you are not tempted to leave that identity, you will have no fear, you will have love to share and hold onto.**

**And when you know that love that seeks you out, you have joy to boldly give.**