



Sermon Message-Series: “Lights, Cinema, Scripture: Beast of No Nation”

First Epistle: Romans 8: 1-11

Gospel: Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

Sunday July 12, 2020

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We are continuing with our summer movie Netflix series, “Lights, Cinema, Scripture!”

This week we are looking at the movie “Beast of No Nation,” and seeing how our gospel lesson may speak to this movie.

So to give a brief movie synopsis of this film for those who may not have been able to tune in; ***Beasts of No Nation*** is a 2005 novel by the Nigerian-American author Uzodinma Iweala that later became a movie.

The film follows the journey of a young boy, Agu, who is forced to join a group of soldiers in an unnamed West African country after his father and brother was brutally murdered in front of him.

His mother and sister was able to go with the UN peacekeepers during that time.

The tension of the film settles mainly around Agu and his commander of whom he fears;

And as the film progresses, **you and I tragically witness** Agu’s fledgling childhood brutally shattered by the war raging through his country,

You and I witness an innocent child having to face the unimaginable, where at first Agu was conflicted by simultaneous revulsion and fascination with the mechanics of war.....and then we see his life succumb to it; some would say inevitably.

And then the pivotal moment comes towards the end when this young troop of boys and teenagers/young adults, turn on their commander when they run out of supplies, ammo and food.

Agu and the younger boys turn themselves in and are taken in by a missionary shelter/hospital ran by a preacher and a white woman, Amy.

Amy at the end of the film invites Agu to share his thoughts and feelings about all that he had been through.

And Agu after pausing for some time said to Amy, this white woman; **“If I’m telling you this to you, you will say that I am some sort of beast or devil....I am all of these things...but I also have a**

mother, father, brother and sister once. They loved me.”
And so this is where I would like to focus my preaching energy this morning on; looking at this metaphor and image of “beast,” as we bring in our gospel today for more discussion and examination.

Because when unpacking this image of beast that Agu lifts up towards Amy, it occurred to me that this imagery; I believe is what might be one of the reasons for why achieving the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven is so difficult;

Because the way I see it; **this imagery of beast** invites us and perhaps even challenges us; to really examine how you and I are viewing one another.

This **image of beast** invites us to consider and examine; Are we viewing one another as human beings of equal and intrinsic worth?

Or when we see one another, do we see something else?

Are we seeing in one another our fears?

Are we seeing in one another our biases?

Are we seeing in one another our prejudices?

Are we seeing in one another our past track records, criminal records, rap sheets and other list of indiscretions?

Are we seeing in one another differences that may challenge us and/or threaten us or even enrage us?

What are you and I seeing in one another; how do you and I see one another....I think these are the questions of what Agu’s powerful statement at the end of the movie raises within me.

Furthermore this **imagery of the beast** is one of the reasons why I believe that it is so difficult for humanity to live into what it means to love our neighbor fully....

This imagery of the beast is one of the reasons why seeds of equity and inclusive love is so difficult to take root in some of our hearts...

This image of a beast is perhaps even why lost lives such as Michael Brown, Rayshard Brooks and George Floyd may have never made it before a jury of their peers....

This image of a beast may be why black Mothers and their daughters are held at gun point in a parking lot by a white couple who suggests that they were fearing for their life; in fact the woman’s exact quote from that altercation in the parking lot where she accidentally bumped the teenage girl without allegedly saying she was sorry was; “This is not something we wanted at all,” —“I didn’t understand how it escalated to where it escalated and I was afraid.”

This image of beast may be why Covid-19 has perpetuated Asian racism and xenophobia worldwide;

Why International Students and their livelihoods are so easily displaced by our governmental leadership;

And why monuments of America’s oppression and cruelty is revered to be history; even if it brings harms to others who don’t wish to see it anymore.

Because of this very image of this beast that we may or may not consciously hold onto;

Where instead of you and I viewing one another as human beings with human stories...

All we see is **this beast**.....

And to make sure that you and I are on the same page when I talk about this beast....let me take a moment to define what I mean by beast.

And so typically a beast is defined as an animal; especially a large or dangerous four-footed one.

Looking at the context of the film of why Agu might have referred to himself as a beast; **Agu knew** that he was forced to do things that children don't normally do.

Agu knew and understood that the life he was forced to live in if he were to survive, was morally incomprehensible....

It was hard to witness as the viewer and that is an understatement for sure.

So the film implies that it was because of the savage acts that Agu was made to do along with his peers, is why Agu referred to himself as a beast.

Because perhaps Agu knew that he and his troops were doing beastly things, so therefore **they all must be beasts.**

This is why I propose some people had issues with the way George Floyd's life was honored....because his past infractions may have suggested **that he was a beast**.....

This is why the size of Michael Brown was emphasized so greatly or why 17 year old Laquan McDonald was shot not once but 16 times, or why Tamir Rice was killed carrying a replica toy gun...because of this **image of the beast**....

This is why the marginalized and the poor tend to be overlooked and mistreated because of this image of the beast....

And so there are many personal beasts we all may struggle with, sickness, relationship struggles, financial hardships, depression, food insecurity and more;

But why I am focusing today on the beast of racism, oppression and inequity is because this is the most prevalent beast that is keeping the kingdom from being fully united both in our film and our world today.

Furthermore, I know that the movie was hard to watch and this sermon may be difficult to even hear.....but in order for us to become the beloved community that MLK Jr. talked about in one of his sermons where he said *Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.*~

The qualitative change that it is going to take is for you and I to begin to tear down and throw away this narrative that we have consciously or subconsciously build up in our hearts; that the other...whatever the other is....**is this beast.**

This fear....this bias.....this prejudice and marginalization towards the other is the real beast!

And so this is the revelation that I see coming from our gospel in our parable today.

A parable that on the surface is talking about a farmer who is attempting to sow seeds but he/she is having trouble doing so...
Because our story paints the picture of four kinds of soil;
And the invitation is for you and I to consider what kind of soil are we?
Are we the type of soil where as soon as the seed falls, birds come along and eat them up?
Are we the type of soil where instead of soil, our hearts are filled with rocks and so the seed cannot even be properly planted?
Are we the type of soil where instead thorns choke out our plants altogether?
Or are we the type of soil that is good soil, where we are able to produce a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown?
This family was the parable presented to the disciples of Jesus of that day;

A parable that explained how you and I might be able to grasp hold of the kingdom on Earth as it is heaven.

A parable that Jesus knew not everyone would be able to fully receive; depending on what type of soil the individual was working with so to speak.

And so **why church this beast imagery** is so relevant from my perspective;

Why this beast imagery is so crucial for us to really wrestle with in our own hearts and minds...

Because the aha moment for me is that this kingdom in our parable is supposed to include all of us;

Every race, every creed, every human being.....that is who is part of this kingdom.

And the way I see it, is if you and I can't get past his view that we sometimes hold in our hearts towards one another....

It will be very difficult to learn what it means to love one another as God loves us.

It will be very difficult to produce real change for justice, peace, equity and inclusion for all; until the beast image is torn down once and for all.

And this is when our first lesson Romans 8: 1-11 comes into play where it says; There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus in which you and I strive to be in;

Furthermore we are human but vs 9 in our first lesson also proclaims and reminds us that we are also in the Spirit.

So it is the Spirit that will aid us in our love towards one another.

It is God's Spirit that will serve as our strength and our shield to rely on.

So the invitation is like the song *As the Deer*; is to get to this place of relying on God's Spirit to give us wisdom;

To get to this place of relying on God's Spirit to help us to see how God sees; to love as God loves; in spite of our trespasses; in spite of our fears towards the other.

As the deer panteth for the water, so our soul longeth after thee;

If this is where we focus our prayers on as it pertains to becoming

more loving like God; this is when I imagine you and I will be able to sing *You're my friend and You are my Brother* but not just to our Lord Jesus; but this love and adoration I anticipate, will also begin to flow over to our sisters and brothers that surrounds us!

So the bottom line church, we all have work to do on this as we continue to pursue justice, peace and inclusion for all.

I have work to do as it pertains to my own personal biases.....you have work to do as it pertains to your own biases.

So if you could not get through the movie because it was too difficult to watch, I invite us all to at least hold on to the words of Agu again; for his words were crucial if we hope to tear down walls and build bridges towards one another....

To remember that in all of our trespasses and those who may have trespassed against us....

To remember that in all of our differences; racial, ethnic, social class, education, political affiliation and more.....

Agu said...I am all of these things...but I also have a mother, a father, a brother and sister once and they loved me."

Peace and Love,

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