

“What I Did For Love”
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Festival of the Christian Home

Second sermon in the series “The Gospel in Great Movies”
Parental Love as seen in “Life is Beautiful”

Today, all around this country, the phone lines will light up, dinners will take place, cards and flowers and gifts will be delivered, hugs and kisses will be exchanged, and families will gather together - because it's Mother's Day - the day our country has dedicated to the women who mean so much to all of us, the women who have helped to make us who we are.

In the church, on this day, we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home - not simply focusing on mothers, but on the whole Christian family, and the importance of the Christian family.

As most of you know, I'm doing a sermon series for the month of May with the theme “The Gospel in Great Movies.” So when I realized that the second Sunday would be the Festival of the Christian Home, I went about trying to find a movie that I thought would best show family and especially, parenting.

There were a number from which I could have picked. I could have picked Ron Howard's movie “Parenthood” because it really shows well the up's and down's of family and parenting. But I didn't. And I could have picked “Baby Boom” which shows an adoptive mother adjusting to caring for a child that was suddenly thrust upon her and changed her life forever. But I didn't.

I chose a movie that many of you may not have seen. It's actually a foreign film that came out in about 1998. It's called “Life is Beautiful.”

Let me tell you about it, and why I chose this particular film for this particular Sunday. “Life is Beautiful” is about a young Jewish family during World War II - a father named Guido, his beautiful wife named Dora, and their adorable little boy, named Joshua. The first part of the movie is about Guido, who is quite a character meeting, wooing and then marrying his beautiful Dora. They have a son and name him Joshua, and though life is hard because of increasing anti-Semitism under Hitler, they love their life together. Dora is a teacher and Guido runs a little book shop in their village.

Tragically, one day, the Nazis come and take Guido and Joshua, and Guido's uncle Eliseo away. Dora discovers them gone and she rushes over to the rail station where the train with all of the Jews is being loaded up and she voluntarily gets on the train herself.

Stuffed in the railroad cars like sardines, they are all taken to a concentration camp. It is horrible. They are treated like cattle. They know what lies ahead, and it is horrible beyond words.

Which brings me to why I chose this movie for today. I chose it because of what Guido, the father, does for his little boy. From the moment they step off of the train, Guido makes the whole thing into a game for his son. He doesn't want him to know the evil of his world. He doesn't want him to know the horror of the concentration camp. So he does everything he can to make it a good experience for him. He turns it into a game.

You'll begin to understand now as we see the scene where Guido, Joshua and Guido's uncle Eliseo get off the train and begin their lives in the concentration camp.

Clip from the movie - -

As you could see, what that father did was absolutely amazing and incredibly risky. There was nothing he wouldn't do for his child - nothing. His love for his child and his desire to protect him and save him was the focus of his life.

Sounds like someone else too, doesn't it? Every time I watch this movie, I can't help but think about how God cares for us just like that. Every time I watch this movie, I think about what God did for us in Jesus Christ. How God sent Him to save us. How God did whatever He could through Christ to protect us, and keep us from harm. How Christ came to show us what abundant life is all about.

I read a story a long time ago about a father and son who were out driving in the car one warm and sunny afternoon with the windows rolled down and wind whipping through their hair. All of a sudden a bee flew in the car window. The little boy, who was allergic to bee stings, was petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. The boy grew frantic as the bee buzzed by him once again. But his dad reassured him. "Don't worry," he told his son, and he reached out his hand and showed his open hand to the child. Stuck in the palm of his hand was the bee's stinger. "Do you see this?" the father asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

In so many ways, that's exactly what Guido did for Joshua in that

concentration camp. What surely would have been agonizing and horrible turned into a game for this little boy, because his father took the sting for him. He loved his child so much that there was nothing he wouldn't do to protect him.

So it is with God and us. Christ has taken the sting for us, has borne the burden of our sins for us, has died a cruel death for us, because there was nothing God wouldn't do to protect us.

It's that kind of love that we celebrate today on this Festival of the Christian home. It's that kind of love that caused the father of the prodigal son to run and meet him with open arms even though the son had done him wrong. It's that kind of love.

Today, let us give thanks for that kind of love. If your mother has showered you with that kind of love, give thanks for that, to God and to her. If your father has showered you with that kind of love, give thanks for that, to God and to him. If perhaps, you are someone who has not known that kind of love from your mother or father, give God thanks for the people He has put in your life who have shown it to you.

Most of all, on this day, let us all give thanks for God's love for us that knows no bounds - that cares so much for us that God would do anything - and did do everything that we might have life in all its abundance.

I close with the final scene of "Life is Beautiful." As it begins, Guido has given his all for his son, he has paid the ultimate price. Joshua has been hiding out as part of the game, and his dad has told him that when everyone is gone, he can come out of hiding. The game has ended, and that's where we'll pick it up.

2nd clip from movie - - -

Life is beautiful - because of love, because of our mothers and our fathers, because of our families, but most of all, because of God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

Amen.