

Sermon, May 8, 2022
Revelation 7:9-17 & John 10:22-30
“Face to Face: Reward”
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Again, let me just take a moment and wish everyone a happy Mother's Day. I know many of you are here with your mothers and those who have been like Moms to you, and I want to thank you for deciding to spend at least a bit of your day with us. For many, these can be difficult times as it reminds you of a mother who is no longer with us, or a bittersweet time as we think of the relationship we didn't have. And yet we can still gather and even in tears celebrate together the joy and the sorrow. It's the miracle of being a part of the body of Christ.

But we do hope you find ways to celebrate or make someone's day a celebration. And we should. When we think of all that the mothers in our lives did or are doing for us, we are probably short changing them by

only giving them a day. But these days do allow us to think of all of the memories we have with them. It seems to me that Mother's Day is a day when we tend to wax nostalgic.

I can't help but think of the many times just my mother and I would go to a movie together when I was young. My dad worked two full time jobs, so he usually wasn't home for these types of things. And so it was often my mother who would take me to a matinee movie. It was about that time Disney was big into doing re-releases. Both animated and live action movies. That was a rarity in days before streaming services.

And we went to most of them. One I remember the most was the release of Pinocchio. I remember enjoying it as a child, but have you seen it lately? Man, that's a dark cartoon. It's dark, kidnapping, the puppet running away, And of course the ever growing nose of a puppet not able to tell the truth.

Of course, the story, as you know, is about the puppet's desire, a quest really, to become a real boy. But Pinocchio is his own worst enemy. The fairy does everything she can to help him become real. She tells him what to do and what not to do. Then she assigns Jiminy Cricket to be what? Do you remember? His conscience. When you watch it, it's a bit frustrating because poor Pinocchio just won't listen, and you watch and think *if he would just listen, this could be so much easier.*

It's funny how our perspective changes as we grow older. The reality is all of this story, the good and the bad, are a part of the process of becoming real. The more he makes mistakes and learns from them, the more he learns to listen to his conscience, the more he experiences the love of his father and the grace and forgiveness by him and by the fairy, the more he becomes ready to become real.

To become real. I've experienced a running theme as I have lead Bible studies lately, in my reading and in my own devotional, it's the theme of becoming real. Leaning into what is real, what's authentic, and letting go of things that are so temporary and unsatisfying they aren't real. I believe because we have been made in the image of a real God. So real He is before and after time, the Alpha and the Omega, that our deepest desire is to find what is real and authentic in life. But more than that, to become more real and authentic, ourselves.

So how do we become real? How do we become authentic, how do we learn to lean into a place where we truly become real? Now, I want to you to hear closely what I am about to say. Most of the ways as we seek to become real in the end will defeat us. Most of the times when people ask the question how do I become real, become authentic, the answers tend to lie in the focus on the self. It becomes more about self-validation. Loving the inner you, accepting who you are. Which, of course, sounds good and there is, I will admit, some truth to it. But there is also a lot of danger. I know myself well enough to know I am the last person who ought to self-validate themselves. Because I will let me get by with all sorts of things. I'll rationalize bad behavior to the point where it's the only logical choice. I'll rationalize in my mind to say well,

of course I did this, anyone in my shoes would have done the same thing, even though that's not true. I'll validate a lot of sin based on temporary enjoyment or satisfaction. No, I've learned that when we become self-centered, when we become the base of validation, all we do in the end is actually embrace that which isn't real. We just tell ourselves it's OK.

No, if we are to become real, as good old Pinocchio reminds us, it must be about transformation. I must be transformed from that which isn't real, which isn't authentic, into something more. I must come face to face with Jesus. Because it is only in that intimate encounter I am naturally transformed into who I am to be and finally become real, lasting, authentic.

That's why we have chosen to look at what a face to face encounter with Jesus looks like in our current sermon series. Our Gospel reading today came from the Gospel of John. And I've noticed in the Gospel of John, every time someone has an encounter with Jesus, He offers them something real and lasting. He offers a thirsty Samaritan woman living water that will slake her thirst forever. He offers the hungry the bread of life that will satisfy, He offers questioning Nicodemus a new life to be born again, transformed, real. And in our scripture today, Jesus says those who hear My voice and who stay with Me will have eternity.

Eternity. I think we short change eternity or heaven when we think of it as our having wings and sitting on clouds strumming harps forever. Let's be honest, that sounds awful. Look instead at the picture given to us in Revelation. It's all about the joy of eternity. A place where all sin is destroyed, all the things that promised to make you happy but failed you gone. All those hopes, false promises gone. All hunger and thirst will be satisfied by the bread of life and the water of life. All the hopes, all the real longings in your life that you have always desired will be truly met. Every tear will be wiped away from your eye. Not because crying is wrong. Crying is OK, Jesus wept. I think it's just that we will become so eternal, so real that the things that caused us to cry simply can't affect us anymore. Our reward in eternity is to become truly real.

So how do we do that? Learn to listen to the voice of Jesus. That's what Jesus says, those who know My voice, who come close, they will experience eternity. You know when you draw close to someone, you know their voice. I can pick my wife's or my children voices out of a crowded room. The closer you come to Jesus, I mean really get close to Him, the more real He makes you. Are you close enough to know His voice?

Stop looking to the temporary to satisfy your eternal desires. Sin is never going to make you happy. It's temporary, that's why you keep going back to it over and over again. Stop eating from the trash bin thinking you are eating fine dining. God has so much more for you.

Don't give up. That's the message of Revelation and John. Life is hard for a Christian, it's not easy. You will experience a world that doesn't get you, it will tell you you're crazy, will persecute you. But don't give up, it's all a part of the process of finding eternity. Allow God to use all of that to make you real. I think of the passage from the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*. It becomes more real when it finds a child that loves it. But that love causes it to be worn, misshapen, some of velvet worn off. But then that's how most of the beloved things in our lives look, isn't it? Maybe that's true of us, as well, as we go through this life and we get battered, we follow Christ damaged and worn. It's the evidence of God loving us, making us real.

Don't give up. Whatever you are going through right now, don't give up. Pain and suffering will pass, hurt and grief will pass away, joy will come in the morning. Hold on, and may each day find eternity and become more real. Amen.