

David Ansen, a former editor for Newsweek, once said that “we are the movies and the movies are us.” Movies often reflect our culture, how we feel, what we’re passionate about, how we view morality, and the meaning of life. I’m sure each of us here today could talk for a good long time about our favorite movies and why we connect with them. A while back I was talking with an engineering friend of mine who is also an aspiring sociologist, and he had an insight about movies today that I never considered. He said, “You look at movies even 15 years ago, and often they ended with good triumphing over evil, with happy endings and a hopeful future. But now, many movies today aren’t so much about the triumph of the good, but of self-preservation.” In other words, movies are focusing more on surviving than thriving. Millennials and Generation Z seem to empathize with such cinematic themes. Life seems to be nothing more for many young people than surviving and the thought of thriving and succeeding can seem far off. Yet, no matter what generational group you find yourself in, the pursuit of self-preservation above God’s revelation has always been a struggle for human beings. This pursuit naturally leads us to false priorities, and spiritual misconceptions. We try to hide. We try to misdirect, but there is a compassionate Father who sees everything.

Enter the book of Hebrews into the conversation. We still don’t know who wrote the book, but I think the author would have preferred to keep it that way. We still don’t know the exact church that first received this book, but we know it speaks just as deeply with our church family here at Christ. This letter was read to people looking for rest from the struggle and challenge of life. They were merely seeking survival. Restlessness pursued them, and the temptation to find rest and preservation in all the wrong escapes surrounded them.

Is that where you find yourself right now? By nature, that’s where we find ourselves far more than we often acknowledge. Be honest with yourself, when you feel life crashing in, what is your first instinct? Is it not hiding? Is it not redirecting? Is it self-preservation? Have you ever found yourself struggling with a sin, and doing everything you could to hide it from the world? Thinking by such self-concealment you can maybe have self-deception, convincing yourself that it’s not a big deal, that you can survive. Have you ever evaluated yourself like that rich young ruler we heard about in the gospel, knowing deep down that self-righteousness isn’t the answer, yet you are unwilling to let go of the material things you’ve pointed to to show your value and your faith? Or maybe you know what was going through Gehazi’s mind in our first reading? This thought that you deserve far more than what God has given you, and so you turn to other means to take what you think is rightfully yours?

It’s all self-preservation at the cost of God’s revelation. As much as we think we can hide our darkness from even the people closest to us, and even if we buy into the delusion that we can hide our sin from our own psyche, it doesn’t change who sees it all. What does Hebrews 4 say? **“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare.”** What are the false priorities that grow out of self-preservation that our loving and deeply involved heavenly Father is warning us about? If you’re like me, one of those false priorities can be hiding your pain, thinking that if you keep everything bottled up, you are helping the people close to you because after all, you don’t want to unload on anyone else, right? Yet, you’re forgetting what we talked about last week, God built you for strong connections with other

human beings and especially your family in Christ. Maybe for you, self-preservation leads to the false priority of “church should be the way I want it to be.” You find yourself upset at the hymns chosen, the way church money is spent, the way fellow members don’t seem to share your ideas. In other words, the Gospel has lost its place at the center of worship and church community, and it’s been replaced by a consumer mindset instead of an other-centered mindset.

Here’s the point, in each case, often on the surface our false priorities can look good, even righteous! The sentiment to shoulder all our struggles, the desire to improve church the way we think is best, the hope that we don’t cloud the gospel if people knew who we really were. But such self-preserving, and self-hiding, can’t escape the notice of our heavenly Father. And thanks be to God that we fail every time we try to hide anything from him!

When he sees us, shaking like leaves as the winds of life hit gale force, he speaks to us a Word that is **“living and active.”** In a world where trauma, suffering, death constantly confronts us, His Word penetrates through the darkness. When we try to cover up our sin, his Word is **“sharper than any double-edged sword, it divides our soul (our spiritual self) from our spirit (our emotions). It judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.”** Like a careful surgeon with a scalpel, your loving Father cuts down into the deeply hidden chambers of your heart. There is nothing in your heart that cannot be drawn into the light by the Author of life himself.

At first, this is scary. God knows you more intimately and in more detail than you will ever know yourself. You are completely exposed before him. No place to hide, no sheet to cover up. No opportunity to preserve yourself, no other priority that can change a thing. But that’s the first reaction. The second reaction for you, God’s dear child, is not cutting, but healing.

Can you think of a moment in your life when this healing happened as your heavenly Father spoke to you through someone you love? Can you remember that sin that you thought you were hiding so well, that darkness you lived in, can you remember when it was exposed to the light of Jesus? When a Christian lovingly approached you and revealed your false priorities and pointed to the Savior who has made you his top priority? As much as we hate getting called out for our wrongdoings, there is no more healing feeling than our heavenly Father confronting us with his Word whether in the Bible or through the mouth of Christian. The lie we had been living is broken. Self-preservation abandoned, salvation given.

Your Father in heaven has a word that is always **“living.”** It’s not just that it’s always relevant, it’s also that it will always produce life in you. If you are feeling like that rich young ruler, trying to find something within yourself that will validate that you’ll be okay, see how Jesus reacted to him, he **“loved”** him. He loves you. Rejoice that all our sins have been laid before the face of God. Because it shows you the depth and width and height of his love for you. The Great Physician has taken his scalpel of the Word and has sculpted away the sclerosis of your heart. All your sins were spread out before him, and he picked up every single one of them, carried them on his back, nailed them to the cross, and cut away every last bit of shame and guilt.

Do you know what's even more beautiful? That scalpel of the Word is still living and active in your life too. As you have more and more conversations with your heavenly Father, he will keep on revealing to you how self-preservation still clings to the deepest struggles of the heart. Never with the intention to shame you, but to heal you. He is teaching you what confession and forgiveness looks like, feels like. He has stripped away the pursuit of self-preservation and in its place, placed in your heart Savior-recognition. Jesus, the Word made flesh, lives and is active within you. He has revealed who you really are. By grace, you throw at his feet all the trophies and medals of self, and in turn he places on your head a crown of righteousness, a title of royal priest as you follow the Prophet who speaks the Word to you always, the Priest who empathizes with you, intercedes for you, gave the ultimate sacrifice for you, the King who rules all things in your life, who leads you through valleys of trauma, days of wrath and moaning into his strong arms of compassion and pardon.

There's really only one response to such gifts. There's really only one way we can thank our God who laid bare his love, hung exposed, and rose to restore you. It's not hiding, it's confessing. The Christian life revolves around repentance. Your Father wants that most joy-filled life for you. Because by faith, you know when you expose the darkness you're dealing with, the light of Jesus will always overcome it. You know confessing your sin of self-preservation and false priorities to your Father will not lead to shunning but to welcoming. You know the promise of forgiveness Jesus won for you. You know that confessing your sins to others will not lead to isolation but restoration. As the Word reveals to you more and more the depth of your sin, I beg you to not forget that through such insights you find more and more the depth of God's grace and love for you. You discover more and more how deep the Father's love for you is and how vast his beyond-all-measure forgiveness.

If David Ansen is right that "we are movies and movies are us," then when it comes to the movie of life, "We are God's and God is ours." My dear family, sit with your heavenly Father as often as you can, don't be afraid to walk into the O.R. of confession with the Doctor of Souls, Jesus. Discover how the Word is always electric in your life. It will always empower you to dive into the bottomless treasure of grace that God has given you. Find rest for your soul in God alone, you know your salvation comes from him. Rejoice that your Father sees everything! Because more than anything else, he sees you for who you really are: his child who will always remain his top priority. Amen.