

## ***“Finding Nemo: Let Us Refuse to Live in Fear of What We Cannot Control”***

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden  
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, June 8, 2025

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/> Scroll down on the homepage to CHURCH ONLINE and click the button, “Digital Worship Archive”.

Scripture for the day: Matthew 6:25-29, 33-34 [NLT]

And the **Disney•Pixar** classic, *Finding Nemo* (2003).  
CVLI Reference: <https://www.screenvue.com/results/finding%20nemo>

### OPENING

We conclude our Easter worship series today: ***Easter Through the Eyes of a Child.***

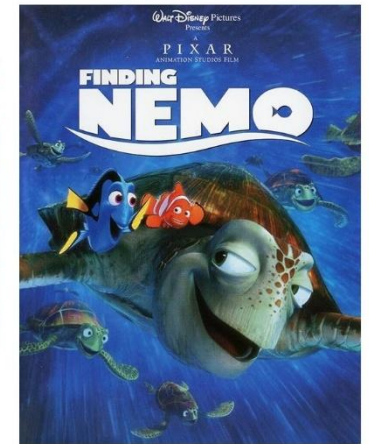
As I’ve said before, this series emphasizes what I find to be a central teaching of Easter: We need not be stuck in patterns of thought and behavior that have the power to rob us of life and entomb us.

Jesus’ passing from death to life through His resurrection, accompanied by His invitation to follow Him and become a new creation in Him (2 Cor. 5:17), means that we can pass from death to life, too. That is, we can be transformed in our inner being through relationship with Christ, into all that God dreams of us becoming. But we have to have eyes to see and ears to hear, along with a willingness to respond, to what the Spirit of God is showing us.

As Anna said earlier, the driving illustrations for this series are five classic **Disney•Pixar** movies that put some very grown up themes in playful terms that children AND adults can understand and benefit from. The movie for today is the 2003 classic, *Finding Nemo*.



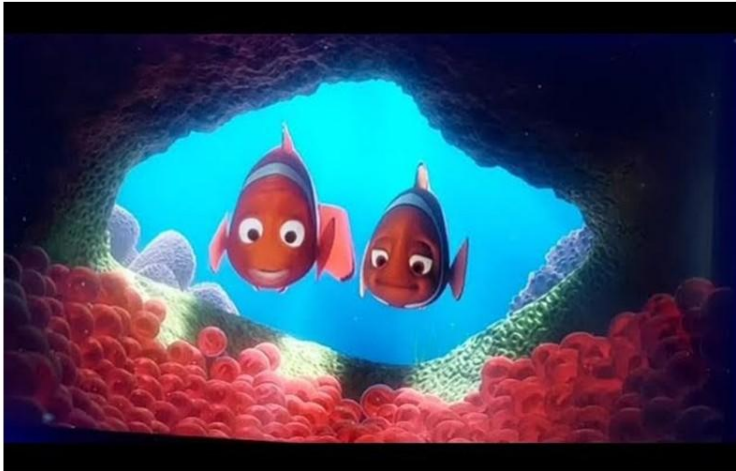
*Nemo and Marlin*



It is the underwater saga of a little clown fish named Nemo and his dad, Marlin, along with a whole host of other marine life characters that take you on an epic journey across an untold number of ocean miles from the reef that is home to Nemo and his dad right into the heart of Sydney Harbor, Australia. Why? Because one day while trying to assert his independence from his overprotective, “helicopter” father, Nemo is netted by a scuba diver who takes him to the saltwater aquarium in his dental office, where a very scary fate awaits him. But that’s getting ahead of ourselves!

The story opens with a beautiful scene of Marlin and his fish-wife, Coral, playfully anticipating the joys of

parenthood, imagining how they will tend to their 400+ hatchlings, now contentedly growing in their egg-cases safely hidden in a small hollow in the coral reef they call home.



*Marlin & Coral admiring their soon-to-be brood of 400+ hatchlings!*

### SERMON THOUGHTS: What About the Not-so-childish Themes Running through the Movie?

1. Marlin's fear of the unknown / of danger is one of them.

In the beginning, Marlin is anything but fearful; more distracted and absent minded really, caught up in his own world – quite the opposite of Coral on whom the coming responsibilities of parenthood are in no way lost!

Then, the unspeakable happens and disaster strikes – in the form of a ravenous barracuda who lays waste Marlin and Coral's dreams, leaving Marlin

alone but for one egg-case that survives the holocaust.

(\*First video clip:

(\*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nMh0ORXbds>  
(\*0:00 to 1:55. Start sound fade at 1:53.\*)

From this point on, Marlin's fear of the unknown / his fear of danger drives the rest of the story. And young Nemo, who lives under his father's pledge that "nothing (bad) will ever happen to him", finds it not protective but suffocating – and something, naturally, to rebel against which, ironically but not surprisingly, exposes him to near-mortal danger.

As Marlin's experience demonstrates, this kind of paralyzing fear is almost never without basis. But it *is* often overblown and exaggerated in our minds. Not always, but often enough to be aware of – and wary of.

2. The second not-so-childish theme running through the movie: The fullness of life is never experienced in isolation; we need each other. In scene after scene, one form of marine life or another guides Marlin and his ever-optimistic, if irritating assistant, Dory – a blue tang in real life – to a contrite and joy-filled reunion where both Marlin and Nemo realize they have some "growing up" to do.

→ Related: Diversity is a thing of beauty – most of the scenes in the movie are breathtaking in the way the color and the diversity of underwater life are vividly pictured.

3. Finally, *Life* is a gift, an adventure, meant to be embraced and lived with gusto! (Not with reckless abandon or rebellion, which can get you in trouble – as it did Nemo – but with courage and joy and freedom.)

(\*Second video clip:

(\*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAezL6z17Dg>

(\*0:00 to 1:39. Start sound fade at 1:36.\*)

### RESURRECTION / TRANSFORMATION:

1. Paralyzing fear of the unknown / of danger has the power to rob us of life and entomb us. The Easter event – Jesus’ facing fear and death head on and being raised to new life after the unspeakable happens to Him – has the power to break the seal of the tomb that encases us and set us free!

As 2 Timothy 1:7 has it, “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*”

The Greek term translated “self-discipline” means more than the English translation conveys: It means “*to behave in a sensible manner, with the implication of thoughtful awareness of what is best*” [Source: Lexicon in Logos Bible Software].

So, paraphrased: *God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and the ability to behave in a sensible manner, thoughtfully aware of what is best.* No entombment here!

2. One of the patterns that got Jesus into a great deal of hot water with the religious authorities of His day was his embracing and welcoming of all who were drawn to him – from lepers and harlots and those possessed of evil spirits to the religious elites and collaborators with the Roman occupation.

Jesus’ vision was of a human family that recognized the ground of its being in the *imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God. And that meant no one was an outsider, no one was without value, no one was beyond the love and grace of God. And, by implication, no one should be beyond our inclusion, either.

To vilify persons because of the color of their skin, their national or cultural origin, the terrors they are fleeing from unrest and injustice at home, or how they experience and express love or themselves against cultural norms – to engage in such vilification is to be aligned against the ways and priorities of God as Jesus lived them out.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are values reflective of the Kingdom of God, not values to be feared and suppressed. Jesus was crucified by the powers of His day because of His unflinching adherence to living out Kingdom principles. And His resurrection / the Easter event empowers us to live them out boldly, as well.

3. Finally, Jesus’ resurrection / the Easter event is the ultimate triumph of life over death. It is the undeniable expression of God’s “bias for life”, if you will. Jesus said in John 10 that He had come

that “*we might have life and have it in abundance!*” That “*it is the thief’s purpose*” – the enemy of our souls – “*to steal and to kill and to destroy*” [John 10:10, NLT].

And so, let us embrace the life that God has given us and, even when it’s hard, live it large, with gusto, with courage, with reckless abandon only to the truth of God’s unending and unconditional love for us. As St. Augustine, one of the early church bishops and theologians said, “Love God and do as you please.” That is NOT a license for reckless, licentious or abusive behavior; it is a guiding principle to frame and govern the lives of all who would live faithfully and joyfully in the Spirit of the living Christ.

## WRAP-UP

Much is changing with the conclusion of this day. Ten years of love, struggle, cooperation, joy, uncertainty, agreement and disagreement, life coming to an end, life at its beginnings – in a phrase: ten years of life in ministry together. And fifteen years in three other communities before that! As I’ve said before, we will never get this time back, but I wouldn’t trade one of these past ten years with you for anything.

Could we worry about what’s to come? As Jesus said in Matthew, about whether we’ll have enough food and drink or enough clothes to wear (Matt. 6:25)? In other words, about how the next phase of our lives is going to unfold? Of course we could, but to what end? All of our worry can’t even add a single

moment to our lives (Matt. 6:27), He pointed out. So why give ourselves to it?

As He said, “*Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*” (Matt. 6:34, NIV).

My choice in going forward into a very open-ended future at this point is to trust God to lead me – and you – in times when all seems right with the world and to strengthen us for the times of great challenge. Both are coming, but as Paul wrote to the Philippians, “*We can do all things through Him who gives us strength*” (Phil 4:13, NLT).

I was so grateful when, a month or so ago, I learned that the Choir wanted to be here for my last worship service and to sing one last piece together. When I asked Jim what anthem we were doing, he said, “What would you like to do?”

I didn’t have to think very hard about what piece it was that I have loved from the first time we did it, that bears full witness to my life with God, and that I wanted to leave you with.

♪ Choir’s Anthem, “How Can I Keep from Singing?”