

“*Monsters, Inc.*: Love Drives Out Fear”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, May 4, 2025

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/>

Scripture for the day: Isaiah 41:8-10 [NLT]

And the *Disney•Pixar* classic, *Monsters, Inc.* (2001).

OPENING

We started a new church season on Easter Sunday, not hard to guess the name: The Season of Easter! And with it, a new worship series: *Easter Through the Eyes of a Child*.

This series is one of my own creation and emphasizes what I find to be a central teaching of Easter which is that 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.

As I said at the start of the service, 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 remarkable connections between the themes in these movies and the central teachings of Jesus may surprise you! Once observed, however, they are impossible to miss. Today’s movie: the original *Monsters, Inc.* (2001).

- Introduction to the story
 - ✓ Primary characters, for this sermon, anyway



James P. Sullivan, a.k.a. “Sully”, our hero



Mike Wazowski,
Sully’s wise-cracking
sidekick



“Boo” – The object of Sully’s affections and protection

- ✓ But there’s a darker side to the story. Two characters introduce the tension that drives the plot:



Randall Boggs – the villain and Sully’s nemesis



Mr. Watnoose, CEO of Monsters, Inc. and unsuspecting architect of evil

- The premise and plot in BROAD strokes...
 1. A scream contest: Who’s the scariest monster in the history of Monsters, Inc.? Not surprisingly, it comes down to a competition between Sully and Randall.
 2. Monsters, Inc. runs on the energy provided by the fearful screams of village children evoked by nighttime encounters with the monsters. These screams are captured in canisters and stored for later use.

The town runs on the energy provided by Monsters, Inc.

SERMON THOUGHTS: Not-so-childish Themes Running through the Movie

- Fear: used as a weapon to intimidate and control
- Fear: used to secure and perpetuate ill-gotten economic gain
- Lies: the basis of Monsters, Inc. –
 - (1) That the fear/screams of children were OK to cultivate for material prosperity and
 - (2) That contact with children would result in the death of the monster.
- That one’s “ends” can justify any “means” used to achieve them.
 - For Watnoose, “the ends” was the preservation of his family’s empire, *Monsters, Inc.* Its influence and prosperity were declining as the world changed, and its future was threatened and uncertain.

→ The “means” were

- (1) The fear his whole system of howling, shrieking, snarling, roaring, sometimes grotesque monsters evoked in children and in the monsters themselves – AND
 - (2) Eventually, even the kidnapping and destruction of Boo, Sully, and Wazowski were not seen as being off limits, since they contributed in their sick way to the preservation of Waternoose’s empire.
- But in the interim, the story takes a surprising turn, and Sully sees firsthand what he’s been a part of. The scene is a demonstration set where Waternoose is trying to school a group of trainees on how to frighten children. Sully has figured out that the villain, Randall Boggs, is behind a wicked plot to extract screams from children in a still more evil way, but Sully doesn’t know that Waternoose is in on the scheme. So, Sully is unwittingly coerced into demonstrating his legendary scare techniques with devastating effects on Boo AND on his own conscience. Take a look –

(*YouTube clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC-fziUyDck> 0:19 – 2:21*)

RESURRECTION / TRANSFORMATION: Two Easter Messages

- Point of Transformation (Easter message 1): Sully realizes that what he’d bought into as “normal” behavior was wicked and evil and destructive. AND he commits to righting the wrongs of

Monsters, Inc., actions which eventually expose Waternoose for who he is and bring down his evil empire.

Fascinating: It wasn’t only those at the top of Monsters, Inc. who profited from the spoils of empire who knowingly and actively resisted Sully’s commitment to justice. It was even some of Sully’s closest associates and friends, like Mike Wazowski, who resisted his efforts to overturn the evil. They, too, were ruled by fear: Fear of not knowing how to imagine life outside the status quo.

- The Transforming Power of Love (Easter message 2) – Sully’s for Boo and Boo’s for Sully – finally defeated evil and delivered justice: The righting of the wrongs of the system of empire and the toppling of Mr. Waternoose WITHOUT the collapse of their society.

SPEAKING TO OUR WORLD TODAY

- The same themes that run through Monsters, Inc. characterize much of the world and its leaders today including, sadly, our own:
 - ✓ Fear and lies are used as weapons to intimidate and control;
 - ✓ Fear and lies are used to silence opposition and thus maintain the values and goals of empire;
 - ✓ Fear is used to suppress truth and to prop up the system of lies that tyranny requires to thrive;
 - ✓ Fear of change is used to perpetuate lies that maintain the status quo;

- ✓ Any means are seen as justification for the accumulation and concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few.
- But as we heard from the prophet Isaiah, fear is contrary to how God wants us to live. So fear mongers traffic in unrighteousness, ungodliness, and sin. This is especially so for those entrusted with the responsibility of leadership.

So, what are the take-aways from all of this? The Easter messages contained in the movie:

1. The power of Jesus' resurrection empowers us to commit ourselves to justice and righteousness – to the righting of wrongs – when we recognize that what we have been brainwashed to accept as “normal” behavior is, in fact, wicked and evil and destructive – AND contrary to the ways and will of God.
2. What is captured best in the motto of our United Women in Faith: *Love in Action can Change the World.*

WRAP-UP: Transition to the Reprise of the Anthem

The Choir's anthem focuses us on the truth of our faith, truth that we would hold onto and live into if we would be followers of Christ:

It is only in Christ that we are raised up to stand on mountains.

It is only in Christ that we can walk on stormy seas.

We are truly strong only when we are standing on His shoulders.

Only He can raise us up to more than we can otherwise be.

♪ Reprise of the Choral Anthem “You Raise Me Up”, pickup to m. 42 *al fine*