

THE GRINCH: A NEW HEART

Introduction

*Every Who down in Whoville, liked Christmas a lot,
But the Grinch who lived just north of Whoville, did not.
The Grinch Hated Christmas, the whole Christmas season,
now please don't ask why, no one quite knows the reason.*

*It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight,
it could be his head wasn't screwed on just right,
but I think that the most likely reason of all,
may have been that his heart was two sizes too small.*

*But whatever the reason his heart or his shoes,
he stood there on Christmas Eve hating the Whos.
Staring down from his cave with a sour Grinchy frown
at the warm lighted windows below in their town.*

Two weeks ago, on a Sunday afternoon, the Opera House in Mitchell showed *The Grinch*—the 2018 animated version. I took Elsie, and we sat with the Cox family. It was nice, and for me, it was a bit of research for today's sermon. There's a lot of good stuff in that movie which is based on a Dr. Seuss book written in 1957.

Doing a little more research I found that Dr. Seuss didn't really see the Grinch as a villain but rather, I think, as a wounded person whose heart was hardened and shrank, becoming "two sizes too small." I think he was green with envy and it showed up as cynicism. The Grinch just needed to experience true love and kindness.

The story shows how the green Grinch—highly annoyed by happy Whoville folks—plans to steal the joy of the Whos by stealing Christmas from them. The Grinch believes the key to their joy is found in Christmas presents, food, decorations, and other material things. So he steals it all. He takes it all up 3,000 feet to the top of Mount Crumpit where he plans to dump it. As he stands there, waiting to dump and destroy it all, he listens, hoping to hear misery as people wake to discover their loss.

*So he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow
It started in low. Then it started to grow
But the sound wasn't sad! Why, this sound sounded merry!
It couldn't be so! But it WAS merry! VERY!*

*He stared down at Whoville! The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!
Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small
Was singing! Without any presents at all!*

*He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming, it came.
Somehow or other it came just the same.
And the Grinch with his Grinch feet ice-cold in the snow,
stood puzzling and puzzling. How could it be so?*

*It came without ribbons. It came without tags.
It came without packages, boxes, or bags.
He puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore,
then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before.
Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.
Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.*

Discussion

Deep spiritual things often happen on mountains. Something happens on Mount Crumpit.

*And what happened then? Well...in Whoville they say,
the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day!*

His heart enlarges in a healthy way and opens. The Whoville community and their unity draw him in. As they sing, he repents of his sin. He goes down the mountain and gives back everything he has stolen. Repentance leads to restitution.

Surprisingly, the Whos welcome the Grinch. They don't judge him. They don't arrest him. They don't condemn him. There are no questions. They simply accept him and his large penitent heart. The community of unity becomes a community of love and grace.

I don't know if this is what Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) had in mind, but to me, this is a picture, I believe, of what Jesus has in mind for his people, for us. I think the Whos and Whoville are a picture of the church and the people who make it up—tall and small, small and tall. Whoville represents a worshiping community that brings unity out of diversity. They sing together the same song.

*Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,
Would stand close together, with Christmas bells ringing.
They'd stand hand-in-hand. And the Whos would start singing!
They'd sing! And they'd sing!*

And know what they sang?

*God rest ye merry gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's pow'r
When we were gone astray
Oh tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy*

The Whos sing of comfort and joy! Comfort and joy even in the midst of losing all their material things. True comfort and joy don't come a store, anything we can buy, or having more. It doesn't come from things. True comfort and joy come from Christ—the one who delivers us from Satan's power.

There are a few things we can think about as we look at *The Grinch*, but I want to settle on one thing. The thing that strikes me is the power and impact of a worshiping community of unity. The Whos—tall and small, small and tall—are a worshiping community of unity all singing the same song, and it's song about comfort and joy that come from Jesus.

Comfort and joy—two things that we really want and need. Isn't that what you want? The Whos have it, and they share with each other. Initially, it's offensive and off-putting for the Grinch. He's wounded and cynical, but as he looks and listens at a deeper level, the unity of the Whos becomes irresistible.

Yes, I know we are talking about a children's book made into a movie, but it is a powerful illustration of several Red Letter Words—words of Jesus about community and unity and how they impact the world.

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

—John 13:34,35 NLT

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

—John 15:11,12 NLT

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

—John 17:21-23 NLT

It's undeniable—Jesus wants his people to be a community of unity that impacts the world. It's a community of unity that breaks down cynicism and skepticism, a community that sees hurting people—people at risk—and looks past pain-driven bad behavior to see a broken heart, 2-sizes-too-small that needs healing. We are a community of unity that is built on, and points to, Jesus.

How do we become and maintain a community of unity that impacts the world? It's all about connecting to one another through Jesus. When we are baptized into Christ, we are also baptized into the Body of Christ.

We have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

—1 Corinthians 12:13b NLT

We are placed, by God, into the Body of Christ, and then it's up to us to keep the unity we have been given. We've been empowered but we must cooperate with the Spirit of God. We do this through gentle humility.

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

—Ephesians 4:2,3 NLT

The key, of course, is love. God loves us first and asks that we respond with his love back to him and to each other. The love of God, *agape*, is a decision, an unconditional commitment. What does it look like?

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT

What does that really look like? How does love show up in the family of God? What does it look like as we present ourselves to the world and its wicked ways? In *Fellowship of Differents*, Scot McKnight defines God's love as having 4 elements:

1. It's a covenant together or a rugged commitment to someone.
2. It's a rugged commitment to be with someone.
3. It's a rugged commitment to be for someone.
4. And it's a rugged commitment with that someone to seek to become Christlike together.

That works well in the church, and it works well as we seek to engage those in the world. It's a rugged commitment to fellow image-bearers of God both in the church and in the world. The way we treat each other is vitally important, and I believe the key is worship.

Worship ushers us into the presence of God. Encountering God brings transformation as we view his loving mercy (Romans 12:1). Take the time to worship daily, and this gathering is super important. It's a reminder we all sing the same song—together—of God's saving grace.

I feel like I need to say something about the opposite of Christian unity. If true unity in Christ is attractive—and it is—then the opposite is also true. Disunity is repulsive, both in the church, but especially in the world. Disunity fuels cynicism and skepticism. It deeply harms the cause of Christ.

Disunity displayed, especially in social media, makes me wince. I think ungodly Grinches are watching and being pushed farther away from God as we attack others with memes of meanness and cutting comments.

Should we just let things go? Are we supposed to be soft on things that matter to God? No. It's the methodology that concerns me. There is a way to deal with differences and disagreements. Jesus said to go to the person and talk with them. I love the way Priscilla and Aquila deal with Apollos in Acts 19. He was a powerful eloquent preacher, and he was preaching the wrong thing about baptism. Luke tells us that Priscilla and Aquila quietly took him aside, talked to him, and explained the truth to him. They didn't blast him on social media.

Conclusion

When we worship God, when we cooperate with the Spirit of God by giving him room to work, then he continually forms us into the image of Jesus. We become new and renewed daily. We become different. We make attractive the teachings of Jesus (Titus 2:10). We worship together. We work together. Together, we focus on our commonality in Christ rather than our dividing differences. How am I doing with this? You?

The love of God allows us to make room and allowances for differences. Peter, who knew a lot about a lot, including conflict, says it like this in 1 Peter 4:8, "continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins."

Way back in 1980, I went to Scotland for a couple of weeks on an evangelistic crusade. We were in the beautiful city of Edinburgh. We were working a poorer part of the city in high-rise housing. We knocked on doors all day, inviting people to study the Bible with us and to come to nightly worship gatherings at the nearby church building. Each night, after the worship gathering, people would stand outside enjoying the unity that comes from a community of grace. Several nights into this, a man came to some of us, nearly in tears, and said, "I've been watching you folks for the last few nights. I've never seen such joy. I want what you have."

That's the way it was in Whoville as the Whos loved each other. The Grinch, and he didn't even know it for a while, wanted what they had. He wanted comfort and joy that comes from love.

*We are all sinners
God's grace makes us winners
Grace received; sins forgiven
Grace received; grace given*

Communion

The final act of the Grinch's redemption is a meal. He is invited to the feast. He is welcomed at the table. The story that begins with alienation, separation, and isolation ends in table fellowship with a worshipping community of unity. At the table, the Grinch proposes a toast:

To kindness and love, the things we need most

As we eat the bread and drink the juice, we can see the Grinch's story is a reflection of ours. Because of the loving-kindness of God, we can receive what we need most—comfort and joy that comes from salvation in Jesus.