

PASTOR'S SERMON

Please note that the following are the pastor's notes for his sermon and may therefore have some grammatical or spelling errors, etc.

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Charlton at the Movies

The Notebook

July 28, 2024

1 Corinthians 13

Beloved church, today we finish our four-week sermon series, "**Charlton at the Movies.**" It has been a unique opportunity for all of us to enjoy four movies during summer. We began with an animated film, ENCANTO, where we learned the value of God's talents and gifts for us and how we can use them for God's glory.

We continue with the importance of trusting God in our planning and learning how to work as a team through the movie ARTHUR THE KING.

Last Sunday, we reflected on the importance of being thankful to God, even in the most challenging moments, through the movie THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

Today, we will reflect on and find out faith in the film *"THE NOTEBOOK."*

The Notebook is a romantic drama film released in 2004. It is based on the novel written by Nicholas Sparks, which has the same name.

I was in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when I saw this movie for the first time. I remember that my mom was with me at that time. Suddenly, in the middle of the film, I heard my mom sobbing and crying, so I said; now, do you understand why I wanted you to watch this movie?

She said, *"You're right; it's a movie that touches the heart."*

Certainly, *The Notebook* is a powerful movie that touches our hearts, and not only that, it teaches us many lessons, so let us discover them together at this time of reflection.

If you remember, the central theme of the movie is **"the enduring love"** between **Noah Calhoun** (Ryan Gosling) and **Allie Hamilton** (Rachel McAdams). Despite facing obstacles and being separated for several years, their love for each other remains unwavering, highlighting the power of true love and its ability to resist the test of time and circumstances. When we see the faithfulness of a love like this, I am sure that the first Bible text that comes to your mind is

1 Corinthians 13 – the Gift of Love — which speaks about enduring love under all circumstances.

We read ***“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”***

We not only hear this text now, but as a minister, I can tell you that it is the most familiar Bible text used and requested in weddings. Interestingly, this letter and chapter's central theme or purpose was not that; it was the energy of the talents or gifts of the spirit. Paul said there was a way in which the gifts were to be used, which was a crucial detail. Some people have tried to explain what has been appropriately called *“the love chapter of the Bible.”* However, some passages in the Bible project far beyond our comprehension and understanding. Chapter 13 is one of them, where the word love comes, in this case, from the word ***agape***, which is used in the original Greek of the New Testament.

We don't have a definition of love in this passage. Sometimes, definitions are destructive, and trying to define love could constitute a serious violation of this chapter. Let me give you an example: When you try to

define "a rose," you can read the description of a rose as you find it in a Botany book or see a picture of a rose. But that definition doesn't describe a rose as you perceive it when you look at it, smell it, touch it, and experience it.

Love is experiential. You need to live it! If we can understand it, there is no other way to understand it.

Has someone perhaps described a sunset to you? If you have observed a sunset on an island, for example, you will indeed have been excited and found it challenging to describe it. You must have had a hard time finding the right words. Therefore, this chapter offers us a sample, an exposition of love, and not a definition.

"The Notebook" is a film in which love is experienced. It goes beyond the common understanding, but this is how love works.

A second theme presented in this film is the **"social class differences."** The movie addresses the issue of social class differences, as Noah comes from a working-class family, while Allie belongs to a wealthy, upper-class family. This class divide creates conflicts and challenges for their relationship, reflecting societal prejudices and barriers.

Was that easy for Noah and Allie? It wasn't. Social class differences are often barriers that make our journey

more difficult. Why? Because we don't see love as the common ground, but the differences.

Returning to our Bible text, the apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth about people excluding each other due to their differences in gifts and talents. Is not this something that we constantly see in our society? People who exclude other people because of political views, religious backgrounds, racial issues, or just because we are not capable of accepting others?

What differences do you still keep in your mind and heart that don't allow you to feel the word LOVE properly? – Think and meditate!

During my pastoral visits, I have encountered our third theme of the movie more than often. Remember, the first was ENDURING LOVE, and the second was SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES. The third theme relates to ***“the memory and Alzheimer's Disease”***:

In 2020, as many as 5.8 million Americans were living with Alzheimer's disease. Younger people may get Alzheimer's disease, but it is less common. The number of people living with the disease doubles every five years beyond age 65. This number is projected to nearly triple to 14 million people by 2060. So, we are not talking about something that doesn't affect us.

I remember planning to visit someone who suffered from dementia one day, and as I was leaving my office, I mentioned it to one church member; that person said, *"Pastor, what is the idea of visiting someone who doesn't even remember who he is?"*

I have to say that, to my surprise, people who suffer from memory loss are willing to remember certain things that have meaning for them, like singing a hymn or even in the sacrament of Holy Communion; I have experienced their glance of remembrance of what it means.

Being a dementia-friendly church is about more than welcoming people with dementia. It also involves adjusting and adapting to the places and practices of worship so that people with dementia can continue participating in the church's life however they choose to.

The movie's framing narrative revolves around an elderly Noah reading their love story to Allie, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. This aspect of the film explores the heartbreaking effects of memory loss and the importance of cherishing and preserving memories, especially those of love and personal connections.

Are we a welcoming church to those who are experiencing dementia and memory loss? – Think and meditate!

Our fourth theme from the movie is: "**Overcoming Obstacles.**"

Noah and Allie's journey is filled with obstacles, including World War II, family disapproval, and societal constraints. The movie emphasizes the idea of persevering through challenges and fighting for what truly matters, even when the odds seem insurmountable.

Life is full of its ups and downs. One day, you may feel like you have it all figured out. Then, at a moment's notice, you've been thrown a curve ball. You're not alone in these feelings. Everyone has to face their own set of challenges. Overcoming challenges will help you stay centered and remain calm under pressure.

Everyone has their preferences for how to face a challenge in life. Most of the time, for Christians, the first thing that comes to our minds is to pray. Prayer is essential and fundamental, but it is not the only way. As I was reading a Christian article about how to overcome obstacles and challenges, the person who wrote it gives eight possible ways;

1. Reading Your Bible
2. Staying in Prayer
3. Casting Down Imagination
(a fancy way to say, *"reject negative or sinful thoughts."*)
4. Choosing Faith Over Fear
5. Abstaining from Sin
6. Trusting God Completely
7. Seeking Strength and Wisdom from God
8. Trusting in God's Plan

How do you overcome obstacles in your life? Are some of these strategies part of your personal strategies to face challenges? – Think and meditate!

Overall, The Notebook is a poignant exploration of the enduring power of love, the challenges faced in pursuing it, and the importance of cherishing memories and holding onto the connections that truly matter in life.

We have been blessed by finding faith in films during these four Sundays. It has been a journey from animation to true stories, from magic to real-life issues. It has been a time of gathering, watching the movies, and sharing a meal on Fridays. Still, it has also been a time of gathering and reflection on Sundays, and not only that but also of meditation and Bible studies on Tuesdays. Ebenezer, "Thus far, the Lord has helped us." Amen.