

## **Sermon: August 8, 2021**

### **“Not Evil, Just Uninformed”**

Written by: Rev. Jessica M. Townsley

Scripture: Exodus 2:1-10, 3:7-12; John 15:9-12

In a memorable line from the film *X-men* made in the year 2000, Professor Xavier says, “Mankind is not evil, just uninformed.” This line, refers to the tendency for humankind to fear what it does not understand. In the context of the film *X-men*, it’s a fear of those who are different, termed “mutants,” and the fact that ordinary human beings are attempting to cage and eliminate them from existence. These mutants are people with extraordinary abilities, but who are so different that they have been ostracized to the point that many of them have internalized the hatred and ire of society and turned it so inward that they begin to doubt their own self-worth. Their own ability to contribute. They begin to see themselves as so different that, in some cases, they’re a threat even to themselves.

This is August at the Movies: Superhero Edition and today we’re talking about the *X-men* movie from the year 2000 which kicked off an entire franchise that is still going to this day (I think). As I stated, the film follows a group of mutants who run a school for the “gifted” and who attempt to bring in newly identified mutants to protect them and to harness their power for what the director of the school, Professor Xavier, sees as benevolent means. Now, as with most superhero films, if there’s a “good guy” there’s also a “bad guy.” For our heroes, that foe is two-fold a mutant who goes by the name Magneto and a group of U.S. Senators led by Robert Kelly, who want to essentially outlaw difference and wipe out mutants from the face of the earth. It just so happens that Senator Kelly is an enemy both to

Magneto and Xavier, but each will attempt to confront their adversary with different goals in mind. For Xavier, that's persuading Kelly and the other senators through non-violent means to see the mutants as fellow members of humankind, with the ability to recognize that their similarities outweigh their differences. He wants a peaceful solution and coexistence alongside humanity.

Magneto takes a different approach. His solution is to mutate the leaders of the world who have gathered for a summit in New York. He thinks this is giving them their just desserts for having maligned and attempted to oppress those different than them. Maybe he thinks that becoming mutants will make them have some compassion, but as we learn in an experiment with Senator Kelly, forcing someone to be something they aren't—making a human a mutant—compromises the structure of their bodies and destroys them from the inside out. Even knowing this is the fate of the world leaders he plans to force to convert, Magneto moves forward with his evil plan. And Professor Xavier's crew must try to stop him before it's too late.

Xavier's leadership reminded me of a much-loved biblical character: Moses. Moses was born an unassuming child to a Levite mother in Egypt in a time when Pharaoh had issued a decree to kill all Hebrew males. So threatened is Pharaoh by the presence and increasing numbers of these Israelites who were not Egyptians, that he felt the need to eliminate any potential threat to his rule and power.

But Moses's mom had another idea. When the baby was born, she could tell that he was special—there was something different about Moses, so she hid him for three months until he could no longer be hidden, she took him down by the Nile as the other male babies who had been drowned

were, but instead of drowning him, she placed him into a little papyrus basket, waterproofed with tar and pitch, and set him off on a journey whose end she could not know. Further down, but still within sight of Moses's big sister, Pharaoh's daughter stumbled across the basket and found inside it, a crying little bundle of joy and took pity on him, asking Moses's sister (who had found her way to the scene) if she should go get one of the Hebrew women to nurse this child who was clearly one of the Hebrews. Moses's sister naturally brought his own mother to be his wetnurse and Pharaoh's daughter decided to adopt and raise the child as one of her own.

Though raised by the daughter of Pharaoh, Moses was not an Egyptian, he was... different. Special, as his mother noticed from his birth. He was strong and knew his people were being mistreated. He has some missteps, namely, killing an Egyptian man who attacked a Hebrew man—and keep in mind, the Hebrews had now been subjected to slavery under this Pharaoh's rule. When Pharaoh found out what Moses had done, he set out to kill Moses, but Moses escaped to Midian and settled down, finding his wife and starting a family.

Moses becomes a shepherd and thinks he's free and clear from Pharaoh's reach and living the good life when all of the sudden God appears to him through a burning bush and tells him he's gotta go get the new Pharaoh to let his people go. Moses does not think he's anything special so he tries to get God to go with someone else saying, essentially, why me? Well, God, knowing how remarkable Moses is (since God created him after all), commands Moses to go forward and do as he's told.

And so Moses, while very human and imperfect, goes on to become the titular leader of the Israelites, leading them out of Egypt, through the

wilderness, and right up to the promised land (though he himself will never set foot there). It is through Moses that the miracles of God are shown to the Israelite people and through Moses that God delivers not just his big ten commandments, but also a set of laws intended to keep them alive and together as a people in the great exodus through a deserted land from Egypt. And this story, the story of Moses and his people's trek through the wilderness, takes up the entirety of the next 3 books of our holy Bible. Moses leads a people who will defy and complain and whine and fail time and again to really understand God's commandments and to fully grasp what it means to be in covenant with God and yet, so great is God's faithfulness, that, with the leadership of Moses and a select few others (including some women) they will find their way after 40 long years to the land of milk and honey.

Moses will foster his people's understanding of their chosenness by God so that when they fear hunger and death and want to turn back to the secure brutality of slavery in Egypt, Moses is able to convince them to go on. He will convince his people that they aren't inferior and do not need to live in fear much like Professor Xavier will do for each of the new mutants who will come into his school after being determined to try to live under the radar and keep their chosenness secret. Professor Xavier sees in them what God saw in Moses and the Hebrews: that they are remarkable as they are and that they do not deserve to be maligned and treated poorly just because they are different. Their difference is not a deficiency, but they are extraordinary just as they are. He knows that with the right leader and tools, they can live into their gifts and become the people they were meant to be—a people whose love for others like them will compel them to love even

those who would oppress them so much so that they will risk their lives at the end of the film to save them.

Because Xavier knows what Magneto refuses to accept and that is that the people who would oppress and eliminate them are not all bad, they are just afraid of what they don't know. As I mentioned earlier, at one point in the film, Xavier says of humankind that they "are not evil, just uninformed." He treats his students at the school for the gifted as though they are remarkable and worthy of love and acceptance and he teaches them that they can exist in the world, that they have a place. That they are not faulty or flawed, they are gifted and have value as individuals. Xavier and Moses continue in a long line through scripture and history and film history of people who, while different or outcast or deficient in the eyes of others, in the eyes of the powerful or the dominant, are nonetheless remarkable in the eyes of God.

So I say to you today if you're feeling other. If you're feeling faulty or flawed. If you're feeling like you don't fit in. Like you are on the margins of the world, walking in the shadows instead of living into the bright sunshine of who are were made to be, let this be a reminder that you were made in the image of the blessed and holy God, the one who saved Moses in that river, the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and to the Promised Land, the one who raised up a king from a lowly shepherd, the one who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ and appeared to Mary outside the tomb after rising from the dead, the one who created all that is and was and ever will be. You are remarkable in the eyes of the One who made you and don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise. Amen.