

December 17, 2017

Christmas Goes to the Movies

*How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*

"How Big Is Your Heart?"

Romans 12:9-13

**Opening words:** Two of the worst Christmas movies ever made are *Christmas Caper* (2007) and *Santa's Slay* (2005), which was a Christmas horror movie. We will not be looking at those movies in this sermon series, *Christmas Goes to the Movies*. We are uncovering the divine truth found in classic Christmas movies. To date, we have looked at *Christmas Vacation* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Next Sunday, we look at *Elf* and *Home Alone*. Today's movie is the animated version of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. It is on television every year. How many times have you watched *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*!?

*How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a children's book written in rhymed verse and illustrated by Dr. Seuss. The story criticizes the commercialization of Christmas. It follows the grouchy, green, cat-like, cave-dwelling, bitter character, the Grinch, who tried to stop Christmas by stealing all the Christmas-themed items from the fictitious town of Whoville on Christmas Eve. In 1957, Random House published that story in book form. The National Education Association has named it one of the best books ever published for children. In 1966, the book was turned into an animated TV film starring Boris Karloff as both the narrator and the voice of the Grinch. Our scripture reading for today is Romans 12:9-12. Let me call this message *How Big Is Your Heart?*

**Romans 12:9-13** <sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

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George Sand once wrote, "*There is only one happiness in this life, to love and to be loved.*" If you agree with that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

His name was the Grinch. I do not know if that was his first name or his last name, but it was his name, Grinch. He lived in the mountains 3,000 above Whoville on Mount Crumpit. His only companion was his loyal dog, Max. I do not know what he did the first eleven months of the year, but he spent the last month of the year cursing Christmas. He cursed Christmas because his heart was "two sizes too small." What made matters worse was that the Whos in Whoville embraced Christmas. They had their Christmas decorations. They had their favorite Christmas customs. They ate their traditional Christmas feast, the roast beast. I do not know who wrote it, but the Who had their favorite Christmas song that they sang continuously. All of this in earshot of

the Grinch, who was perched on Mount Crumpit. After years of Christmas celebrations, the Grinch decides to take a stand. He is going to stop all the Who's Christmas celebrations by stealing the Whos's Christmas items. In what is maybe the worst homemade Santa costume ever made, the Grinch sneaks into town and (under the nose the Whoville Police Department), steals everything. He ascends back to Mount Crumpit and waits to hear the cries of the devastated Whos. You know the story. He doesn't hear the cries of disappointment. He hears their favorite Christmas song, one more time. Perplexed, the Grinch begins to think and discovers something he has never considered. Christmas is more than commercialism. Christmas is so much more. That revelation changes everything. It changes the Grinch. It changes how the Grinch views Christmas. In the end, the Grinch saves the Who's Christmas and saves himself. His tiny heart grows three times its original size. He returns to Whoville just in time to return their presents and carve the roast beast. If that sounds familiar, say, "**Amen!**" That leads us to this morning's question. How big is your heart? Do you have a heart that is two sizes too small? Or, do you have a heart that is three times the normal size? Those questions lead us to our scripture reading for today.

Once again, we find ourselves in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul's theological masterpiece. If you look at the outline of Romans, then you discover the first eleven chapters of Romans are very doctrinal in nature. Chapters twelve to the end are very practical in nature. Our reading for today is very practical. Verse nine summarizes the rest of our reading. It simply says, "*Love must be sincere.*" In other words, in Grinch terms, you, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, must have a large heart. The love that exists within the life of the church must be genuine. If your love is genuine, then you must hate evil and cling to what is good. If your love is genuine, then you must be devoted to each other and respect one another. If your love is genuine, then you must have a passion for Jesus. If your love is genuine, then you must have hope in the face of hopelessness. If your love is genuine, then you must share with one another within the life of the church and be hospitable toward non-believers. Dr. Seuss and the Apostle Paul understood the power of love. So, let me ask you today's question one more time. How big is your heart? Do the people in your life consider you a big-hearted person? Maybe this is a better question: Does Jesus consider you a big-hearted person?

### **Do you love your community?**

The Grinch hated Whoville.

In December of 1994, I was preparing for my first Christmas as the pastor of this church. I wanted to be the pastor of this church for several reasons. One was my parents. My parents were aging, and I wanted to live near them. They lived in Warren. I will always be thankful that I was near them in the last years of their lives. I came because of my parents. When my parents died, I stayed because of my children.

If you have photographs from that year, you will notice that I and my family have changed. Kathryn looks the same, but I have grown old and gray. (When I came to this church I had no gray hair. Look what you have done!) In December of 1994, my

daughters were nine years old and four years old. Kathryn and I are big believers in stability for children. I wanted my children to call one place home, so they could develop long-term friendships. The problem is, I work in the world of United Methodism. The word is "itineracy". That means the Bishop appoints you annually, so you can move annually. It is hard to be stable when you are always moving. I didn't want my family to become Methodist gypsies wandering around the East Ohio Annual Conference. I worried about being moved each year, but was liberated from that burden in June of 2008. That was the year my youngest daughter graduated from high school.

Since 2008, I have stayed here for me. Yes, I have turned down other offers to go to more exciting places. Can I be honest with you? Kathryn and I like it here. We have fought to be here. We have made friends in this community and friends within this church. I am proud to be the pastor of this church, and wonder what my life will be like when I am no longer the pastor of this church. I like the Mahoning Valley and I am proud to call it home. Can I go one step further?

I have grown weary of people who bash this area. I am tired of people who return here for a visit and bash us. If they hate it here so much, then just don't come back. I am tired of people who live here and act incarcerated. There are no walls around this area to keep you here. I wish all the area bashers would just move away; we will try to get by without you. I do not care about weather; I am not that shallow or sensitive. I am not preoccupied with our problems, because every area has problems. The Mahoning Valley gave my parents a good life. The Mahoning Valley gave my children a great future. The Mahoning Valley has been good to me because it is filled with good people, like you. I refuse to be like the Grinch, who hated his community. If you will admit you like this community, say, "**Amen!**" Is your heart big enough to include a whole community?

### **Do you love other people?**

The Grinch hated the Whos.

The word is prejudice. Webster defines prejudice as an unfavorable feeling or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason. How many prejudiced people do you know? How many people do you know who are proud of their prejudices? This is the hardest question: How many prejudices do you hold? If you are going to have a big heart, then you must eliminate your prejudices.

Several years ago, I came across this quiz online. If you answer it honestly, you will discover if you are prejudiced person.

1. If God were a person, what race would he be?
2. Have you ever passed on an email about "rednecks?"
3. Have you ever told a joke about gay people? Illegal immigrants? Fat people? Ethnic jokes?
4. How many people not of your race are in your address book?

5. Have you ever told someone not to tell a sexist, racist, homophobic joke in your presence?
6. How often do you find yourself in the minority (ethically, racially, religion or income level)?
7. When you learn about another group, is it from a third party?
8. Do you speak differently of another group if one of that group is in your presence?
9. Have you ever clumped a whole group together with a negative value statement? (The Blacks...The Irish...)

It is obvious. We all have some work to do. The Grinch hated the Whos. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. You are supposed to love everyone. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Is your heart big enough to love other people?

### **Do you love yourself?**

The Grinch hated himself.

Do you remember the story? When the story begins, the Grinch's heart was "two sizes too small." That small heart caused him to hate the Whos and he hated Christmas. He thought he could prevent Christmas from coming by stealing all their Christmas presents, decorations and food. He discovered Christmas couldn't be prevented. Christmas is not about what we own; Christmas is about who we are. In the end, the Grinch saves Christmas for the Whos and his small heart grows to three times the normal size. But, here is the best part: The Grinch doesn't just learn to love the Whos and Whoville. He learns to love himself, and gets to carve the roast beast. This is the best question of the day: Do you love yourself? It is impossible to be happy and not like yourself. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Never forget it. You are so valuable, Jesus died for you. Is your heart big enough to love yourself?

How big is your heart? Does anyone here today have a heart that is "two sizes too small?" Does anyone here today have a heart that is "three times the normal size?" Is your heart big enough to love this community? Is your heart big enough to love everyone in this community? Is your heart big enough to love yourself? This is the good news for today: Jesus has a very large heart. He loves us all. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** George Sand once wrote, *"There is only one happiness in this life, to love and to be loved."*