

**At the Movies**  
***Zootopia***  
**March 5, 2017**

**PRELUDE – This Is Amazing Grace**

**Worship Song – This Is Amazing Grace /  
Good, Good Father  
Announcements – Shannon**

**Video Clip - 01 EVOLVED (2.2 min)**

(Begin) Voiceover: “Fear. Treachery.  
Bloodlust.”

(End) Judy: “Thank you and goodnight!”

<SLIDE SET 1>

Thank you and *good morning* everyone.

How many of you have seen this movie? If you haven't, you're missing a real treat. You may have heard that *Zootopia* recently won

the Academy Award for Best Animated Film of 2016, and for good reason:

- It's so well-done from an artistic viewpoint.
- It's got some really great music.
- The dialogue is snappy and sometimes hilarious (especially the parts where Disney pokes fun at its other animated movies – like *Frozen*).
- For the most part, it's a great story with some pretty timely morals.

More importantly – at least for the purpose of this series – it provides an amazing analogy of an incredibly important biblical vision ... which means that what *we're* about to do with it is quite similar to what *Jesus* did whenever He would tell stories about everyday things that people could relate to.

He would tell a story and then He would say:  
“the Kingdom of God – a life lived where God  
is in charge – is a lot like that.”

And that’s our goal today. So, let’s get into it.

## **Basic Storyline**

And let’s start out by getting an overview of  
the basic storyline.

It’s 15 years later (after the opening scene  
which we just saw) ...

**<pic> And Judy Hopps is now an adult  
... rabbit.**

- Despite many obstacles, she’s graduated from the police academy at the top of her class.

- And she's traded the carrot fields of Bunnyburrow for the city streets of the great Zootopia.
- Full of excitement and enthusiasm, she is ready to make the world a better place!

Unfortunately, her first day on the force doesn't go anything like she expected. Instead of being treated like "a real cop," she is assigned to meter maid duty.

**<pic> In the process of that carrying out that assignment, she runs into Nick Wilde, a sly and crafty fox ...**

... who appears to be a sincere father just trying to buy an ice cream treat for his little boy.

In reality, however, he's running a scam – a

hustle – and in the process, he takes advantage of Judy’s enthusiasm and naiveté.

Check out his cynical response when she confronts him.

### **Video Clip - 02 YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE**

**(1.4 min)**

(Begin) Nick: “Tell me if this story sounds familiar.”

(End) Nick: “Hang in there.”

The next day starts out even worse. Judy’s record-setting pace of ticket writing looks good to her chief but the citizens of Zootopia don’t like it, and they let her know about it.

Just as she is about to despair, a shop owner reports a robbery. Suddenly presented with the opportunity to be “a real cop,” Judy sheds her meter maid jacket and captures

the thief.

Later, Chief Bogo begrudgingly credits Judy's quick thinking but also communicates his displeasure at her going outside of the range of her assignment. As she responds to him, *an interruption occurs which will change her destiny.*

Let's watch.

**Video Clip - 03 IN GOOD HANDS (2.0 min)**

(Begin) Judy: "Sir, I don't want to be a meter maid."

(End) Judy: "Thank you, ma'am."

<SLIDE SET 2>

Turns out that Emmet Otterton is one of 12 animals – all from the predator class – that have mysteriously gone missing. And now,

with the blessing of Assistant Mayor Bellwether, Judy is on the case.

As she begins to investigate, the trail leads back to – of all animals – Nick Wilde.

Nick isn't responsible. He just has some information that, at first, he is unwilling to share. But Judy hustles *him* and tricks him into becoming her reluctant assistant.

**<pic> Eventually they find themselves in Little Rodentia; in the company of the Godfather-like Mr. Big whose first inclination is to “ice” Judy and Nick.**

Fortunately, Mr. Big's daughter – who is getting married that same day – recognizes Judy from the robbery and credits her with saving her life. As Judy and Nick join in the festivities, they discover the shocking truth

about Emmet Otterton.

Let's watch.

**Video Clip - 04 WE ARE STILL ANIMALS**  
**(1.1 min)**

(Begin) Family portrait

(End) Mr. Big: "We may be evolved but deep down, we are still animals."

<SLIDE SET 3>

Judy and Nick follow the lead Mr. Big gives them and discover that all 12 of the missing animals have gone crazy and into attack mode.

**<pic> Furthermore, they discover that Mayor Lionheart knows about it.**

In fact, because he's afraid there will be panic if the citizens of Zootopia find out



about it – especially those animals that are of the “prey” class – he’s secretly been taking them off the streets and locking them up until an answer can be found.

Judy and Nick – who have, at this point, formed a friendly and respectful partnership – discover the hiding place and “out” the mayor ... which leads to his resignation and the elevation of Assistant Mayor Bellwether to his position.

With everything now in the open, Mayor Bellwether and Chief Bogo hold a news conference at which Judy is asked speculate on what caused the 12 to go berserk.

As we watch, pay particular attention to how Nick, who is thinking about joining the police force, reacts to her speech.

**Video Clip - 05 SOMETHING TO DO WITH BIOLOGY (2.2 min)**

(Begin) Judy: “It may have something to do with biology.”

(End) Judy looking at his application

Things go from bad to worse at this point. More animals from the predator class suddenly go on the attack which then raises the level of fear in the prey class. And pretty soon, all of Zootopia is in an uproar (pun not intended).

At this point, the Chief and the Mayor decide that what’s needed – what will calm the citizens – is a hero ... by the name of Judy Hopps.

**Video Clip - 06 NOT A HERO (1.4 min)**

(Begin) Judy: “I don’t understand.”

(End) Judy walks out

<SLIDE SET 4>

Judy returns to Bunnyburrow and the family farm where she is surprised to discover that her parents have actually become business partners with Gideon Grey, the fox who, throughout her youth, hounded her (sorry, couldn't resist).

At one point, Grey even apologizes to her.

**<pic> And in the course of that conversation, she learns that her parents use a purple flower known as a "Night Howler" to keep bugs out of their fields.**

But this flower has a very dangerous side-effect when eaten: *uncontrolled aggression*.

The light comes on and Judy realizes that,

back in Zootopia, someone must be poisoning predators with it. So, she returns to the city and reconciles with Nick: she confesses that she really is a dumb bunny and he forgives her.

And the two of them determine that, sure enough, there is a secret plot to turn predators violent; shooting them with darts that contain a serum from the flower.

Unfortunately, just as they make their discovery, Judy and Nick are captured and thrown into a pit by the mastermind of that plot ... who turns out to be ...

Well, let's watch.

**Video Clip - 07 YOUR WORD AGAINST YOURS (2.1 min)**

(Begin) Nick & Judy look up as Bellwether

laughs.

(End) Judy: “It’s called a hustle, sweetheart. Boom.”

<SLIDE SET 5>

And with that ...

- Bellwether is arrested
- The poisoned predators receive an antidote ...
- ... which returns them to normal ...
- ... which calms the “prey” class
- Nick joins the force and becomes Judy’s partner
- And they all live happily ever after ...

... because, of course, this *is* Zootopia.

## **Obvious Lessons**

Now, I want to focus most of my energy at this point on what this movie communicates as it relates to that incredibly important biblical vision which I mentioned at the beginning ... which means that I'm not going to say a whole lot about the more obvious lessons that are right there on the surface.

Lessons such as:

**We have the power to make choices and, therefore, to rise above our circumstances.**

For example, we don't have to be trapped by *social determinism*, which is what we see in Judy. If our parents and friends have low expectations ("bunnies should stay home at the farm") we can go beyond those artificial limitations and choose a high-achieving

career in the city.

And, to some extent (but not as much as the movie would have you believe), we also don't have to be trapped by *biological determinism*. If, for example, it's in our nature to be predators, we can choose to act against our nature and co-exist with our natural prey.<sup>i</sup>

**By the way, this is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote:**

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.*

*Romans 12:2 (NLT)*

Another lesson right on the surface is that ...

**We get to choose how we respond to**

## **being slighted and treated unjustly.**

Assistant Mayor Bellwether was angry and bitter about being “underestimated and underappreciated.” And she let that anger and bitterness define her until, finally, she decided to take revenge, which led to her eventual downfall.

On the other hand, Judy, who received similar treatment, chose *not* to become bitter. Instead, she became even more motivated towards excellence and continued to treat others with respect even when they didn’t deserve it.

This is actually the same thing Jesus did, by the way.

**Peter writes ...**



*He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.*                      1 Peter 2:22-23  
(NLT)

Anyway, those are two lessons right on the surface and, if that's all you get out of this movie, that's not too bad.

## **Digging Deeper**

But let's dig a little deeper and take a look at the biblical vision which is exemplified by *Zootopia*.

A lot of Christian reviewers were quick to point out that the movie does a pretty good job of illustrating the prophetic words of the

Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

**On the Day of the Lord – the Day when all things are set right by God – Isaiah says that ...**

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, [says the Lord] for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-7,9 (NIV)*

I'm fairly certain that it wasn't the goal of

the screenwriters to visualize Isaiah's prophecy, but the similarity *is* quite stunning. For when Jesus returns and renews, restores and regenerates all things, this world *will be* utopia.

However, that's *not* the biblical vision that I see most clearly presented in this movie. The biblical vision that *I* see ... well, I have to show you another clip to explain it – a very short scene from Judy's first few moments in Zootopia; just off the train, fresh from Bunnyburrow.

Here we go.

**Video Clip - 08 UTOPIA ZOOTOPIA (.5 min)**

(Begin) Judy coming up the escalator into Zoo Central Station

(End) Judy looking in awe

<SLIDE SET 6>

Two things jump out to me in that scene:

- First, the vast number of animals of all different kinds; everything from small to large; fat to skinny; naturally clean to naturally sloppy.
- Second, Judy's expression of wonder and delight at getting to be a part of it all.

And when I saw this scene, the first thing that came to my mind was – and try not to laugh – the first thing that came to my mind was ... *the church*.

**Zootopia (it seems to me) is a great metaphor for the church.**

And when I say “church” ...

- I don’t mean the building.
- And I don’t mean the leadership and organizational structure that spans continents and centuries.

What I mean when I say “church” is what the Apostle Paul and other first-century Christian leaders referred to as “the body of Christ” – groups of individual believers-in-Jesus all over the world and throughout the centuries who have joined together for the purpose of supporting one another, encouraging one another, teaching one another, rebuking one another as they individually and collectively follow Jesus and carry out His mission here on earth (which we’ll talk about more in next week’s movie, *Bridge of Spies*).

But that's what the church is. It's not a building. It's not an organization. It's a body of people.

And the reason I thought of it when I saw *Zootopia* – and, in particular, that fresh-off-the-train scene – is that, in a lot of ways, the church – the Body of Christ – is like a zoo. *It's full of wild animals that stink!*

Just kidding.

Well, just *partly* kidding – and you'll see why in a minute.

When Judy observes the great variety of animals that live in Zootopia ...

**... it reminded me of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome.**

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.*

*Romans 12:4-6 (NIV)*

**And to the Christians at Ephesus he wrote:**

*He [Jesus] made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.*

*Ephesians 2:15-16 (NLT)*

Those two scriptures are a pretty good representation of what the city of Zootopia was like: many different types, many different talents, abilities and perspectives.

And there was peace. Not between Jews and Gentiles but between predators and prey; that natural hostility had been put to death (until, of course, Mayor Bellwether started drugging the predators).

So that's one reason I thought of the church: it's made up of all different kinds of people, some of whom are natural enemies.

But another reason I thought of the church is because of Judy's reaction upon arriving in Zootopia. It reminded me of what I have seen countless times throughout my years



as a pastor whenever someone finally understands the Good News of Jesus and ....

- Agrees with God that they are a sinner in need of a savior
- Believes that Jesus died on a cross and rose again in order to be that savior
- Comes to Him and follows Him. They get baptized and become part of His movement and his community, the church.

When people do that – when they become Christians – so many times there’s such a joy and delight that, “wow, lucky me – I get to be part of this!”

I see the same reaction a lot of times in people who are already Christians but haven’t been part of a local church. And they

come to North Heartland and, for some reason, what we do here – the things we emphasize, our style, our values, and our vision – just clicks for them in a way that it hasn't before. And they're like Judy in Zootopia: “oh my, lucky me – I get to be part of this!”

So, that's why Zootopia – the movie – seems to me to be such a great metaphor for the church.

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And I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, “Ok, Rick, that's kind of cool. I can see why you say that. But so what? What's the point?”

Well, let's talk about stinky animals for a

minute.

*Do you remember the first time you went to a zoo?*

I do. I can't remember exactly when and where – elementary school in Baltimore, probably. But I remember being so excited at the prospect of seeing so many different animals.

But I also remember that ...

- The zoo was a messy place.
- It was a stinky place.
- Some of the animals were downright mean and scary.
- Some of them I never saw because they didn't come out of their habitat.

It simply did not live up to my expectations.  
And I was disappointed.

And, in the movie, it doesn't take very long for the same thing to happen to Judy. She quickly discovers that Zoo-topia is not U-topia.

- Nick is not only a scam artist, he's a jerk.
- Chief Bogo is sexist and racist (in an animalistic sort of way).
- Assistant Mayor Bellwether seems to be all "sweetness and light" but, in reality, she is bitter, jaded and dangerous.
- The prey class is still secretly distrusting of the predator class.

And all of this is very disappointing to her.  
And she leaves.

Now, *here's my point*: the same thing happens in church life, too.

**We expect it to be a spiritual and relational U-topia but discover that it's really more of a spiritual and relational Zoo-topia.**

And I've seen it happen again and again over the years. People find a body of believers that they're excited about but, eventually, reality sets in and they discover that the church – *their* church, *our* church, *every* church:

- Is full of people who are still, in many ways, jerks.
- Is full of people who are still, in many ways, racist and sexist.
- Is full of people who seem to be

“sweetness and light” but, in reality, are bitter and jaded inside.

- Is full of people who, even though Jesus has made them one, struggle to overcome the divisions that divide our culture.

Now, most of them don't *want* to be that way, but that's who they are.

*And here's why:* remember what Mr. Big said to Judy and Nick? “We may be evolved,” he said, “but we are still animals.”

That's true of Christians (who make up the church) as well. We may be forgiven and we may be “new creatures in Christ” (to quote Paul), but we are still sinners.

The great Martin Luther, who led the

Reformation back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century which gave rise to Protestantism and, eventually, churches like this one, had a Latin phrase to describe this reality.

**“Simul justis et peccator” – by which he meant “at the same time, 100% saint and 100% sinner.”**

As one commentator puts it, “Any Christian you meet is both enduringly sinful *and* completely forgiven and justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ. Their identity is dual. This is not a half-and-half relationship; it is 100% and 100%.”<sup>ii</sup>

Now, on the one hand this can be very discouraging if you think that the church is supposed to be full of perfect people.

On the other hand, if we’re honest with

ourselves and admit that *we* aren't perfect – that we ourselves are dumb bunnies (remember that Judy herself was as messed up as anybody else) – if we can admit that we aren't perfect, then it also means that the church is a place for people *just like us*.

Long ago some wise sage said that “the church isn't meant to be a museum for saints. It's a hospital for sinners.”

And that is so true. Jesus intended His church to be community of healing from the brokenness that so often gives rise to sinful patterns of living and relating to others.

I love the way the movie illustrates this in Nick, who when Judy meets him, really is a jerk. But at one point, we come to understand *why* he is the way he is.



Check it out.

**Video Clip - 09 YOU ARE SO MUCH MORE**  
**(2.1 min)**

(Begin) Nick: “Never let ‘em see that they get to you.”

(End) Judy: “Nick, you are so much more than that.”

<SLIDE SET 7>

The truth about people inside the church (and out) is that so many of us have learned self-protective ways of relating to others and to the world.

- That’s why we’re jerks.
- That’s why we’re racist and sexist.
- That’s why we’re afraid.
- That’s where a lot of our sinful

behavior comes from.

Now, we don't have to stay that way. And, in fact, Jesus doesn't intend for us to stay that way.

But a huge part of overcoming and growing and changing is having people in our lives who will say to us, "you are so much more than that (whatever *that* is). In Jesus and because of Jesus, you are a saint. You have a good, good Father in Heaven who loves you. That's who you are. And you can begin to live like in that."

That's what the church is all about.

And, again, when I say church I don't mean the building. I don't mean the leadership and organizational structure.

I mean the people who are trying to follow Jesus just like we are, who will know us and love us and tell us the truth.

**For as the Apostle Paul tell us, it is by**

...

*Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament [that's you and me], grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV)*

Friends, church is messy because people are messy. But we need it – we need each other

– because without each other, we’re going to stay just like we are.

So, let’s take off our rose-colored glasses and embrace the fact that even though we wish church could be a spiritual and relational U-topia, it’s really more of a spiritual and relational Zoo-topia.

And that’s not a bad thing.

**Video Clip - A1 REAL LIFE IS MESSY (1.3 min)**

(Begin) Judy: “When I was a kid ...”

(End) Cadets toss hats

Let’s pray together.

Thank you that you love imperfect people.  
Thank you for this imperfect organism that you call “the Body of Christ.”

<prayer>

## Feature – Perfect People

### CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Come and receive Jesus
2. Go to intro class
3. Offering @Door
4. Next week

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.espressotheology.com/blog/2016/4/19/how-watching-zootopia-will-set-you-free>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.mbird.com/glossary/simul-iustus-et-peccator/>