

“Once”

April 27, 2008

Good morning...welcome to the Theater at Oak Hill. Yup, we're at it again. Something a little different...again. And this morning, not just the set up is different, we are approaching the whole thing a little differently. This morning we are basing the entire theme around a movie...the movie *Once*. If you've been around a while, you a probably thinking, that's not that different...we've done that before...we've done *March of the Penguins*...*Happy Feet*. True, true we have. The difference is, in the past when we've done those movies, they've been nice, neat and tidy. A very clean presentation...here is the problem, here is the solution...have a great Sunday, go in peace.

The problem is, life isn't always nice and tidy. The movie *Once*, at first glance is a nice and tidy movie with a predictable format and a seemingly predictable ending. It is seemingly about broken relationships...a rebound...boy meets girl, they fall in love, and the live happily every after. And after all, that is what the movie tagline sets us up for...it says, “*How often do we find the right person? ONCE*” And, that's just what I expected...what I really wanted.

But, like I said, life isn't always nice and tidy like that. I know for a fact that there is brokenness in this room right now, and if there was a magic bullet, a quick answer...an easy happily ever after...we'd take it. This service is kind of like that. For some reason, it just wouldn't fit together so nicely and neatly.

This morning I invite all of us to bring our brokenness to this service. Maybe a song will speak to you, a prayer...a movie clip...

Narrative 1:

Here it is...a guy who is completely broken and searching...and along comes this cute girl...just like she'd fallen from the sky...very predictable.

Here's the thing with this movie. It started on the night of the Academy Awards...It was already past my bedtime and they were still on best performance by a three-legged dog in a short foreign film.

And, just to throw a bone to those of us really annoyed by this, they showed a performance of one of the songs nominated for best song...It was the song *Falling Slowly* from the movie *Once*. I had an immediate and visceral response to the first notes of the song...I sat up and watched...mesmerized. And why? I don't know...it was pure, raw emotion. Music does that to me.

So, I HAD to rent the movie...because it turns out the duo performing the songs actually are the actors from the movie--a touch of authenticity that really spoke to me. So here I am letting this innocuous little movie

quickly break me down...disarm me...get in touch with brokenness in my own life I had conveniently tucked away for a rainy day.

And you know, I should have known better, but I got sucked in immediately. Here is a guy who has lost his girlfriend, put his ambition on hold, has all the talent in the world, but is stuck...then, and then the easy answer comes along. But brokenness doesn't let go that easy...it just doesn't. It has been my own experience that I don't learn to let go until I've been so broken there's nothing left.

Narrative 2:

Oh things are going so well aren't they? This is going to be so convenient. In his darkest hour this girl just shows up...like she's fallen from the sky...heck, she's even a musician. See how well they meshed together? They were meant for each other. I mean...How often do we find the right person? ONCE...right? This is working out just the way I imagined it...Just the way I hoped...just the way I thought it should.

To be honest with you, for me, the movie could have ended right then. Everyone lives happily ever after...I mean this was their time to be together...it was all so right...I had my mind absolutely made up...these two were meant to be together, they were right for each other...there time was now...There was no point in trying to change my thinking—even as gently as Jenny tried to suggest she didn't think this was right—my mind was made up.

Thank you Doug and Dianne for that gentle reminder that what we have in mind, sometimes what we so desperately want on our timeframe doesn't always match what God has in mind...

And you know, I should know better. I've done this before in my own life. Just before Jenny and I were married, I was interviewing for pharmaceutical sales jobs. Somehow, I'd made up my mind that if I had a pharmaceutical sales job I'd be somebody. So, with no real experience or qualifications, I put on blinders and went for it. I got interviews with two highly respected companies and began the interview process. I did quite well.

With both companies I went through the litany of tests, interviews, paperwork and in both cases made it to the final round...the final two candidates. I drove to Nashville for one, and flew out East for the other.

I really kind of put all my marbles in one basket on this one...couldn't think of anything else. Well, I bet you can guess what happened can't you? Neither...I lost out on both jobs. Needless to say, I was devastated. How, why...why not...what now? I had no good answers, and I was truly broken all the way down.

As I reflect back on that experience, I can't help but think about what happens when we try to force things to always work out our way...what we believe is the best...we shut out others, other's ideas...and frankly I believe, when we do that we shut out God. What ideas might God have in store that we limit because of our own short-sightedness?

Living into God's possibilities in our lives requires patience...requires we put aside "us." I've often heard it expressed as...Let go and let God."

Narrative:

STOP the video...What?? That's great?? That's not in my plan for them. That really isn't what I want. So I guess this is letting go and letting God, huh? Honestly though, this is the point in the movie when I looked over at Jenny and she was just smiling...more like...beaming with that see, I told you so look. But you know what...begrudgingly, I was getting it too. I had to catch Jenny's eye and give her one of those...yeah, I get it too smiles.

Closing:

So yeah...happy ending? Happily ever after. Even though I got it, I still didn't like it...at first. Even though I got it, I still couldn't believe the movie ended without THEM living happily ever after. I'm a pretty quick study though, about a week later the light bulb came on...only at full wattage this time. It dawned on me what really happened. It really was a happy ending. It really was happily ever after...just not on my terms.

Because they...well, primarily he...let go of his ideas for their relationship, they both experienced growth far beyond what either imagined. She helped him heal his brokenness...she helped him dream in ways he couldn't imagine before...with her help, he was able to realize his lifelong dream of pursuing a career in music. And her...her family was reunited...truly happily ever after in exponential fashion. So for me...when the light bulb finally went off—I can imagine God smiling saying, you see there was something much more than you were imagining.

And I know that to be the truth. In my own brokenness in not getting those jobs, the happy ending I had imagined just didn't happen...wasn't the time or place. But it was soon after that—really in desperation—I took a job as a teacher's assistant in the a severely and profoundly handicapped classroom at the school where Jenny was teaching. And...this is as honest as I can be, I sure didn't view that as a happy ending, and surely not what I wanted.

But I remember one day...letting go...half praying, half talking out loud to God. Okay...here I am big guy—what do you want from me? Well one thing led to another...I

began coaching at the school, and I found out I really loved working with kids.

The next thing I knew I was enrolled at IUPUI seeking a degree in education...which led to ten of the best years of my life teaching high school.

You know what though, that sure wasn't Stan's plan. Being a teacher's aid wasn't what I wanted. But I thank God every day for that time in my life. As it turns out, there is a time for everything...and most often, and most frustratingly, it isn't always our idea or our time.

Prayer:

Let's pray together...God it is my prayer that as we face the brokenness in our lives...relationships, jobs, illness, death...that we leave room for things on your time and the opportunities you present. God, give each one of us hear the courage to let go and let...You.

Have a great Sunday, go in peace.