

“The whole universe depends on everything fitting together just right. If one piece busts, even the smallest piece, the entire universe will get busted.” In the midst of the squalor of a portable trailer, perched on two old oil tanks, Hushpuppy, a six-year-old with the wisdom of ancient prophets, reflects on her place in the universe. She wonders if something is about to be busted.

When she was born in the Bathtub, an off-the-grid backwoods community in a remote part of the Louisiana delta, Hushpuppy’s mother couldn’t handle how she felt being a mother so she ran off. Hushpuppy’s father, Wink, set Hushpuppy up in her own little house, while he supervises across the sloppy fields in his own quarters. Like any child, Hushpuppy receives and welcomes as normal, the way she lives. Even though there is a hint that she grieves for her mother as she hears her mother’s voice speak to her from beyond, Hushpuppy is deeply connected – to herself, to her father, to her community and to the land and the semi-wild animals that live on the compound, even in her house.

As I mentioned, Hushpuppy has wisdom that betrays her six years, although I’m quite certain if we paid closer attention, we would discover that most six year olds will teach us things we have long since forgotten about what matters in the world. As she watches her father show the signs of what may be untreated leukemia, we learn the beast she fears most is being alone. And even though she’s afraid, Hushpuppy asserts her wisdom again: “Everybody loses the thing that made them. It’s even how it’s supposed to be in nature. The brave men stay and watch it happen, they don’t run.”

How many have seen *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. In my mind, this movie ranks right up there with *Life of Pi*. This is a brilliant story that I’ve described as the adult version of *Where the Wild Things Are*. I only got to see the movie on the small screen, something I regret. It is magnificent and if you’re lucky, you’ll still be able to rent it at the video rental store in the Westview Centre. Rent it! Download it off Torents. See it. This movie won’t win best picture, but it could.

Hurricane Katrina is on the way, and nothing in the Bathtub, the remote community unprotected by any levees or dams, will withstand her furor. The metaphor of Katrina foreshadows the loss Hushpuppy will experience in the death of her father. And it seems Hushpuppy’s real life experience matches the lessons she has learned in the makeshift school room from her teacher, Miss Bathsheba.

Miss Bathsheba tells ancient stories about beasts who ate their own parents and preyed on the early human cave dwellers, as she teaches about the calamity of global warming and how to prepare for loss. In a mix of fantasy and real life, Hushpuppy ends up befriending the beasts. When she lights the funeral fires that will cremate her dead father's remains, Hushpuppy seems to have befriended her worst fear.

That's exactly what is happening in the story that Kelly read for us this morning. Throughout the later chapters of Luke, Jesus is teaching and reflecting on the meaning of peoples' experience. And today we read that far from being his enemies, the Pharisees come to protect Jesus "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." They may not like each other, but in Herod they have a common enemy.

Can you hear another test for Jesus to pass? Another hurdle for him to overcome? Another temptation? This one is fear.

And what does Jesus do. He compares Herod's behavior to that of a fox and God's love and empowerment to that of a mother hen brooding over her chicks. He stands in the face of that fear. He says, I have been healing and preaching for the past two days, and I will continue on day three. Jesus will not be persuaded by fear. In Luke's telling, this is completely consistent with who Jesus is. As we heard, the preceding chapters all point to Jesus facing the worst of his fate as he points his intentions toward Jerusalem. We know that Good Friday is coming and yet Jesus does not back down. Like Hushpuppy, it's almost as if there is a warrior archetype working within him, anathema as that sounds. But peace and justice do not mean the absence of conflict and in this text Jesus makes that quite clear.

In learning about power and conflict at Naramata Centre, there is a theory about what happens when we are afraid. It's called the wall of fear. Essentially, whenever we bump into anything about which we feel afraid – a new experience, a potential conflict, a troubling message to deliver – our natural inclination is to turn from it. We think that to experience that conflict is akin to dying. It's the worst thing that could happen so we avoid it.

What we have to remember of course is that what's on the other side of the wall is new life. We think its death, but it is really new life. If we go through conflict well, the relationship is actually stronger. If we have that experience that frightens us, we know we can experience anything. When we deliver the message with love and compassion, we can trust our own growing capacities. In the song from Jesus Christ Superstar "to conquer death we only have to die."

I'm going to ask you in this moment to think of something about which you are afraid. Maybe it's asking your grown up children to actually move out. Maybe it's telling your parents that you have not met the goals you set for yourself. Maybe you are having to face moving parents into a care facility. Perhaps you're afraid to tell the minister, or your teacher, or your boss, or your co-worker, or your best friend something that has been bothering for a really long time. Perhaps you're afraid of letting go and burning in this caldron the one thing that stands in your way of living freely. Maybe you are in fact, afraid of your own death.

The theory of the wall of fear asserts, the only way through it is through it. In struggling with the conflicts and the fears, perhaps the best thing to do is experience it in your own head. When someone asks you "what's the worst that can happen," imagine living into that worst thing. Moving the wall of fear, (because that's all we ever do is move it, we rarely eliminate it), happens when we imagine experiencing the worst and taking on the fear anyway.

The problem with our worst fear is that we judge it. We make it bad and awful and demonic. The children teach us a different response. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max befriends the Wild Things and they make him King of all the Wild Things. In *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, the symbol of Hushpuppy's world falling apart, the giant beasts, the aurocs kneel before her knowing they have met their match. In the end, Hushpuppy sees her place and celebrates that place. "I see that I am a little piece of a big, big universe, and that makes it right."

All the stories, all his reactions to the warnings, all his reflections on the simple things of life prepare Jesus to enter Jerusalem. Luke sets this all up so that Jesus is prepared to enter Jerusalem knowing he will upset the relationship between Rome and the Temple. In the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jesus is laughing and smiling as he enters Jerusalem knowing full well that he will not be welcome by the temple leaders and Roman authorities. He goes anyway, having prepared his own way.

Friends, we are in the season of Kenosis...the season of Self Emptying. It is a fearsome thing to let go of our own determined wills and our own agenda to dance with spirit and undertake something we neither feel particularly prepared or skilled. It's a simple prayer: "not my will, Oh God, but yours be done." Frightening huh? To think that perhaps your agenda for your life is not God's agenda for your life. Frightening still is to think that in fact your agenda for your life IS God's agenda for your life, and you better get on with it. Go there. Imagine. What's the worst thing that can happen?

I don't know the worst, I know the final. It's new life. It's new life every time. We know it in Jesus. We know it in our own experience. That's the promise of Kenosis friends, the hope of Easter, the grace of God. Amen.