

Devotion, Sixth Week of Eastertide, 2023
Rev. Jeanne Simpson

I recently saw the movie “Otto,” starring Tom Hanks. I love this actor – he can show any kind of emotion and portray a character so well. Please see this movie if you haven’t. It’s about a man who recently lost his wife and retired, and he’s cranky. About as cranky as you can get, except for my Grandpa Swink, who was a truly cantankerous character until he mellowed in his old age. Otto has a clear view of the world, and it involves following rules. All kinds of rules. Rules you and I have never thought of. But he has, and by golly, he’s going to enforce them. He growls at everybody. He marches around the neighborhood every day making sure all have obeyed these rules.

But grace comes to him anyway, in the guise of a Hispanic family moving in across the street, and a stray cat. In spite of his crankiness and determination not to like either the family or the cat, they win him over. And the strangest thing happens – he starts to be nice to other people as well, even when he really doesn’t want to. And in the end, there is redemption and love and quiet heroism.

This movie is literally a sermon about grace and covenant love. I couldn’t preach it any better if I tried. It will make you laugh and cry. It will make you feel better about yourself, and humankind. It will even make you feel better about cranky people, who I’ve found over time almost always have a heart of goodness yearning to escape. That’s our job as people of grace – to help bring out that goodness in those around us – even those who growl instead of greet, who frown instead of smile, and who really yearn for a hug but don’t know how to ask for one. So get out there, people, and show the love of Christ!

Jeanne