



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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Finding Christian Heroes in our Modern Myths

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St. Paul tells us: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32) Kindness is more than pleasant; kindness is vital to Christian living and community. How we treat one another, and respond to the world, is surely what we mean when we occasionally sing, *they’ll know we are Christians by our love*.

I reflect on this constantly in the context of popular culture. Kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness are not part of most of our modern mythology. Our modern stories and cultural myths seem heavily skewed toward unchristian themes like vengeance, self-reliance, and cruelty justified by some ambiguous *greater good*.

Yet we can still find the Gospel message on screens and in the pages of our most cherished modern stories. For example, I find the tremendous life-changing virtue of kindness woven very clearly in Harry Potter books and movies. Surprising those who are fans of the series, I see this theme most clearly in the life of a relatively minor character — Seamus Finnigan.

If you are not too familiar with Harry Potter, it is the third-highest grossing media franchise of all time. I commend it to you as one of our most important modern stories.

Seamus is a wizard in training at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He has an extremely complicated life. His Muggle (non-magical) father didn't know Seamus' mother was a witch until after they were married. It is hinted Seamus' home life is quite strained. He experiences all of the problems associated with Wizardry during the second rise to power of the Wizard-Fascism of Lord Voldemort. Seamus even has normal teenage problems. (Seamus was dating Lavender Brown, and took her to the Yule Ball, before Lavender was dating Ron!)

Seamus is also an Irish Catholic from Kenmare whose Hogwarts years coincide with the last seven years of the Troubles in Ireland. More than any other witch or wizard we meet in the Harry Potter story, Seamus' life is constantly marked by interpersonal turmoil, political unrest, racial violence, and not knowing which governments and which news sources could be believed.

Finally, Seamus is very close, in terms of proximity, to Harry Potter, who is the titular character in all the wild Hogwarts stories we read or watch. Seamus is suspicious of Harry, with good reason, and even though Seamus joins Dumbledore's Army (D.A.), he is not very invested in it until the death of Albus Dumbledore.

Seamus finds something true, something pure, something rallying in Dumbledore's sacrifice. Seamus loses someone who had sympathy, tenderness, and humility. Seamus' mother insists he return home, but instead he stays for Dumbledore's funeral. His half-hearted involvement in the D.A. changes. He is beaten and broken by Death Eaters (Lord Voldemort's henchmen), but still, he stays and fights.

Seamus exists in the context of so many powerful people and cultural forces telling him what to think, do, and be. What finally cuts through the haze and murky jumble of overlapping and contradictory motivations and obligations for Seamus is . . . Dumbledore's **kindness**. Here was a man who was

genuine, loving, and cared about people even when it complicated Dumbledore's life.

Seamus witnessed those qualities in Dumbledore, and it changes his life.

Seamus looks out over the world, a hard and complicated world, and determines that the person worth following – even after they have died – is the person who showed the greatest kindness to everyone, the person who shows no particular determination for vengeance.

Seamus is among my favorite heroes. And though his faith is never examined, he is one of the most recognizably Christian characters. We may, when we are at our best, look out of a hard and complicated world, and seek to be part of whoever is showing the most kindness, the least vengeance. Just as the closest followers of Jesus have always sought to do.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. (1 Peter 3:8)

This is the Gospel, the Good News of God in Christ, the dream that God has for the world. May we all surround ourselves with stories of people for whom kindness is life changing. May we all look for heroes who use love as the final means of knowing who is worth following.