

Text: [John 10:22-32](#)
Date: December 22, 2019 – 4th Sunday of Advent
Title: Bethlehem Blockbusters 4: “Jesus & Kris Kringle: On Love”
Theme: Can we embrace not only the baby Jesus but the grown-up Jesus?

Intro

I've been happy to hear people talking about the movies we've been discussing on Sundays
One of the upsides for me has been studying up on some classic films I didn't know a lot about
The 1947 film *Miracle on 34th Street* was one of those for me

Next Sunday – preview of coming attractions – we're going to talk about *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, which I absolutely loved

1

Miracle on 34th Street is actually a pretty serious movie, for a film about Santa Claus
It's full of serious characters – including Kris Kringle, played by Edmund Gwenn – who is about as *modern* a Santa Claus as I can imagine
He understands something about psychology and is a citizen of the world who speaks multiple languages
Even though it was made in 1947, honestly, there's a lot that feels modern about the film – maybe owing to a very strong and independent female lead in Maureen O'Hara's character, Doris Walker

If you don't know the movie, the plot is pretty simple
It asks the question: what would happen if the real Kris Kringle showed up and started working as the Santa Claus at Macy's in New York?

It turns out – surprise, surprise – the real Santa is a hit
But not for all the reasons you'd expect
When the executives tell Santa which toys to push, he refuses
In fact, he takes it one step further
He tells the parents where they can get toys cheaper – even if it's at Gimbels and not Macy's

Customers respond so well to his genuine concern for them that Doris, who
hired him, along with her boss, both get a big bonus
And Kris's approach spreads goodwill across the city – to the point where
Mr. Macy and Mr. Gimbel shake hands and declare a truce

2

But of course, not everyone is happy with him
When he insists he really is Kris Kringle, people around him begin to think
he's lost his mind
Including Doris

The big moment in the movie is a hearing where they're threatening to
commit Kris to Bellevue Hospital
Unless he can somehow prove that he really is Santa Claus
Doris's boyfriend, Fred Gailey – an attorney played by John Payne – is
called on to represent Kris

And it's a source of some tension in their relationship, as we'll see in this
clip

<clip>

I think in order to be an actor in the 1940s, you pretty much had to have
that hard, angry turn on your heel down cold....

3

Santa comes sharing the Spirit of the Season, and guess what?
We put him on trial

If that happened, why would it surprise us?
As Christians, we recognize this story – we've seen it before

Jesus, in John's gospel, says to his accusers:
"Listen, I've done a lot of good works in the name of the Father."
"Which of these are you going to stone me for?"

Jesus lived a life of pure love
He preached love, he modeled love, he embodied love
And yet, we put him on trial

We have a hard time drawing that close to someone so pure
When we see it, we get suspicious
We can't believe anyone is that good

Or, it can work a different way
Seeing someone that good can start to make us suspicious enough of
ourselves that we get very uncomfortable
We feel called out for our own hypocrisy and failure to live up to our ideals

Either way, we feel like we need to either run from them
Or we need to destroy them
That's the history we've seen repeat itself over and over
With Jesus and with countless other messengers from God

4

I think this explains, in part, why Christmas is so much more popular than
Easter

The baby Jesus is an idea, a promise
A kind of beautiful picture of peace and hope and joy and love

The Baby Jesus hasn't yet begun to call us out
For all the ways we fail to practice
That same peace and hope and joy and love
Because practicing that stuff is hard work!

And as soon as we start to hear what he's teaching
See what he's doing
How he's living - eventually, how he's dying

And how all that bumps up against what we're doing,
How we're living
Then suddenly it starts getting a little too real
So we pull back

5

The baby Jesus doesn't ask a lot of us, except faith
With the grown up Jesus, it's a whole different story
He asks us to repent, to change
To learn how to love – really love
And that's not easy

We feel at times like he demands too much of us
Remember that clip from the movie?

It all feels like a “sentimental whim,” an “idealistic binge”
No one can actually live that way, we tell ourselves
We've got to “be realistic” and “face facts”
Kindness and joy and love are “attractive but not worth very much”

We want to put the messenger on trial
But in reality, we're the ones on trial

So here's my question:
Do we really believe what we say we believe – that God loves us
Is Christmas something more for us than some warm feelings in December
– I mean, will Jesus' coming really change our lives?

This is our trial
Can we embrace not only the baby Jesus, but the grown-up Jesus?
Amen.

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