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**Title:** The Gospel According to Pixar: Coco

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**Text:** [Leviticus 26:40-46](#), [Luke 23:39-43](#), [I Corinthians 11:23-26](#)

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[Watch the service.](#)



There is a fascinating and vibrant holiday celebrated in some subcultures of Latin America. It is known as *Dia de los Muertos* or Day of the Dead, and it takes place through the night between November 1 (All Saints Day) and November 2. It is a holiday to remember those who have gone before us – not to mourn their deaths but

rather to celebrate their lives and all they were while walking the earth.

The holiday originated in Mexico, blending ancient native Aztec rituals with Roman Catholicism that was brought to that part of the world by the Spanish conquistadores in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And although *Dia de los Muertos* has spread to other Latin cultures, it is still most strongly recognized in Mexico.

Assured that the dead would be offended by mourning and sadness, this is a time of celebration, color, food, and festivity – things the dead enjoyed in life. *Dia de los Muertos* affirms death as a natural part of life on the continuum with birth, childhood, and growing up to adulthood, passing on to death and the life beyond death. On the day of *Dia de los Muertos*, the dead are part of the living community, awakened from their eternal sleep to share in the celebration with loved ones from across the many generations.

Big on the holiday of *Dia de los Muertos* are:

1. Face painting, often with white gloves to look like festive calacas and calaveras (skeletons and skulls)
2. Colorful Aztec marigolds are everywhere – the big brilliantly beautiful orange balls of color are sure to make things festive and not mournful
3. The thoughtful creation of ofrendas – or altars – in their homes with photos of the deceased as well as favorite foods and drinks, and memorabilia of those loved ones to encourage their visits from the dead:

There are toys for the kids and tequila and mezcal for the adults.

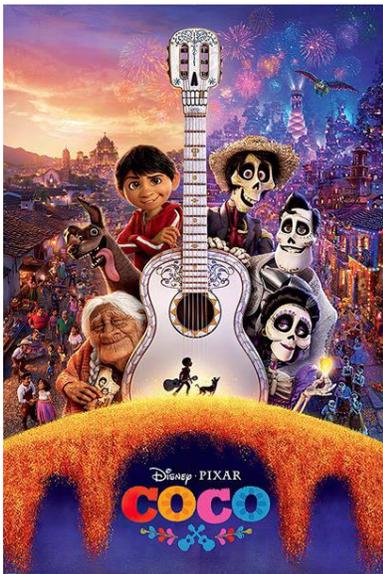
There is also cleaning and decorating of graves in honor of family members who have died.

In this subculture of Mexico, it is believed that people die three legendary deaths, the third being the most poignantly final. The first death is the failure of the body ~ when the body itself stops. The second death is the burial of that body into the earth where it will stay "alive" in the Land of the Dead. In this stage of death, it is up to those who are left behind, those who are still breathing on the earth, to keep alive the memories of those who have died; to pass them down through the stories told. We must not be forgotten by the living, to stay alive in the Land of the Dead.

The third death, the most definitive and final, occurs when no one in the world of the living is left to remember. At that point that those who are living in the Land of the Dead completely disappear. This is called "the Final Death."

That's what the Disney/Pixar animated film, *Coco* is about ~ these three stages of death and how one father, now existing in the Land of the Dead, does not want to be finally forgotten, especially by his daughter, Coco.

This is the second week of our four-week series that Pastor Danny has entitled *The Gospel According to Pixar*. Each week we are looking at one of these tremendous, animated films in hopes of opening the door of discovery to a sacred word in the midst of its story.



Miguel is the young boy who opens the movie with these words, "Sometimes I think I am cursed because of something that happened before I was even born ..." There was this family and they would sing and dance and count their blessings. They loved music!" The mama (Imelda) loved to sing and the papa (Hector) would play his guitar.

Hector and Imelda were Miguel's great-great-grandparents. They had a shared dream to play and sing for the whole world. But Imelda shifted her dreams when their baby, Coco was born. On the other hand, Hector still wanted to sing ~ sing for everyone. And so one day he packed his guitar and left his family to do just that. Before he left, he sang the lullaby *Remember Me*, to his baby girl, Coco. The title says it all... [Remember Me.](#)

The problem was, you see, that through no fault of his own, Hector never returned. His wife was left to raise their little girl all alone. Imelda was so hurt and so angry that she banished all music from her life and Coco's life. Furthermore, she demanded that no one speak of Hector ever again. They were all to forget him – completely.

With determination, Imelda rolled up her sleeves and found a way to provide for her daughter on her own. She learned to make shoes! And for generations thereafter, the family has made shoes.

Fast-forward five generations. Miguel is destined to be the fifth generation of shoemakers and the fifth generation of those who will not speak of Hector or music. But Miguel loves music and wants with all his heart to be a musician.

Miguel gets caught up in the magic of the animated tale and finds himself in the Land of the Dead. He meets his ancestors (albeit as cavalacas – skeletons); all those people whose stories he has heard his whole life ~ people whose pictures and memorabilia had been laid out on the ofrenda year after year. He has come to love them just as they have come to love him from the Land of the Dead.

He also meets the cavalaca of a man who continues, year after year, to try to cross over to celebrate Dia de los Muertos with his family. But he cannot, for no one has put his picture up on their ofrenda for a long time. When we meet Hector, he is about to die his final death. You see, his only daughter Coco is old and demented and about to forget him completely ~ forever. At the end of the story, Miguel is back in the land of the living and sings this same lullaby, *Remember Me*, to his great, great grandmother. Through the music of this particular lullaby, the memory for her father (Hector) returns. And so Hector's life in the Land of the Dead is also restored.

The movie ends as Hector and his daughter Coco (now an old-woman cavalaca) walk hand in hand the following year to celebrate Dia de los Muertos with their whole family, living and dead.

Remember me...

In my family of origin, it's around the meal table. Dinner has always been a fairly formal sit-down affair. Food elicits community and conversation. And the stories start to flow. Remember that time on vacation at the lake when Dad blew his nose into a pancake just to see the reaction? Remember the time that we were visiting Grandma and Grandpa in New Hampshire and Grandpa had that party for us in the barn with lobster and fresh corn on the cob? Remember how scared we all were that time when we were camping in

that horrible storm in Canada? The stories are the glue that holds us together. They are what establish our value systems. It's how we pass on what's important to us.

The story of our daughter, Georgia. She was probably 3 years old and sitting on the potty. She'd been there for a bit and I heard her talking. I put my head in and said, "Hey sweetie, what's up?" "Shhh! Mom. I just talked to God and now I'm listening for God to answer me." That's a story – a faith story – that we tell in our family again and again.

Or the story of Blaine, our son, who when he was 3 or 4, was being tucked into bed by his dad. He quietly rolled over and said, "You know Dad, those times when you first meet someone and your heart is like this (like a tightened fist), but then you get to know them and your heart does this." (and he opened his hand). And then he rolled back over and went to sleep. A faith statement that doesn't get any stronger and must be remembered.

The stories that get told and retold because they shape our value system. They grow our faith. The stories of laughter and tears, of breath-taking fear and spirit-filled "a-ha!" moments. These intense times form the important stories that grow the strong roots that hold us up in the winds and storms to come.

I spent a good portion of my career in the church working in Christian Education and Faith Formation so that our Christian heritage, our common biblical and church ancestors, would be remembered and cherished for the contributions they made to our common faith story. Like so many others over the generations and centuries, I have made that story, that heritage, and those figures of old come to life through lessons taught and stories shared.

Although it seems very unlikely, think about this. The death of our Christian way of life is but a generation away. What we know to be our faith tradition ~ a culture ~ a way of life and death and rebirth ~ needs not only to be remembered by you and me but also taught and told and loved and shared with all generations. We want for there to NEVER be a "final death" of our love of God through Jesus Christ. It becomes our joy and responsibility to pass on the stories ~ to never forget and to pass on the faith.

A big part of the Jewish Seder ritualizes this notion. During the Seder, the youngest child at the table is invited to ask 4 questions ~ questions that are asking their family to share once again, the story of their people and God. And the elders among them tell the story yet again of the Exodus from slavery to freedom.

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7 it is written,

*"Keep those words that I am commanding you today, in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

Remember. Tell the story.

In our Christian tradition, we remember. We tell the story. Every year we pull out the Creche sets – the stable and manger, with Mary and Joseph, baby Jesus and the star. If it's a more complete set, we pull out the shepherds and wise ones also, right? The story is that important. We tell it over and over again.

Some of the most important words for us from the Scriptures are the words of the Lord's Supper that are written in I Corinthians.

*"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. .....  
In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This do in remembrance of me." (I Corinthians 11:23-25)*

*Remember. Every week in our tradition.*

As the story of the crucifixion is presented in the gospel of Luke it is written:  
*"One of the criminals who was hanged there kept deriding (Jesus) and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."*

*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."  
He replied, "Truly I tell you, you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)*

Yes! Indeed, we will be with Jesus in paradise, for we are not, we will not ever be forgotten by God. As is written in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans, *"nothing can separate us from the love of God.* In our Christian heritage, there will be no final death – not because we are not forgotten, for in our humanness, eventually, memory fades and changes things. But not with God. Even when the generations pass and we are forgotten by others, we will always live in the heart and memory and love of God.

Just as it's important that we share those meaningful family-of-origin stories to keep the family heritage alive, so it is also critically important that we tell the faith family stories as well, not because God will ever forget, but so that we can be reminded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, will ever be able to tear us away from God's never-ending forgiveness and love for us.

So, let's share the story of the faith journey and the stories of the church saints who have gone before us so that they will never die. Let's do a good job with our *ofrendas*, our rituals, that commemorate and celebrate our forebears.

We are needed, my friends, to continue to teach and share the stories with others, especially our children and youth. As adults, we are needed.

And you, our cherished children and youth, you need to come to church, to Sunday school and youth group, to read and learn and listen and question and grow in your faith and your relationship with God so that not only will you be blessed by Jesus and the love of God through him, but also so that the story can be passed on and will always be remembered and will never be forgotten.