

Pilgrim Uniting Church
As I See It - Rev. Tony Duncan

Les Miserables

As a young man I remember attending the stage musical "Fiddler on the Roof" and being told later by my pastor at the time that such behaviour was sinful! I didn't believe the pastor at the time, and my subsequent brushes with the theatre have only reinforced my view that good theatre and good literature can tell us much about the human condition.

And this was my experience last Wednesday night as I enjoyed the local Encore Theatre Company's production of *Les Miserables*. What wonderful talent we have in this town.

But it was the storyline that moved me most. Victor Hugo's novel of the same name has been faithfully reproduced in the musical. And that story line is deeply spiritual, deeply Christian.

It's a story of surprises, where a brutalised and hardened criminal is given a second chance by a bishop who takes his vocation of showing unconditional love seriously. When Jean Valjean the convict is taken in by the bishop, fed and cared for, he steals the bishop's silverware. He is captured by the police, but the bishop lies and says that the silverware was a gift. So begins Valjean's road to redemption. Having been shown unconditional love, Valjean's life is turned completely around. And unconditional love can be infectious. Valjean extends that love to all he meets, to a desperate dying prostitute, by caring for her daughter; to a policeman consumed by his duty, by sparing his life when it would be more convenient to kill him, and finally by sacrificing his own life to save a young revolutionary student.

The other character that tells us much of the human condition is the policeman Javert. Obsessed with duty, he sees the world in black and white. Valjean is an escaped convict and he must be punished, so he pursues Valjean with an obsessive passion all over France. When Valjean saves him from certain death his black and white world comes crashing down. His certainties of good and evil are no longer sustainable and rather than seeking new life as Valjean had, he chooses to end his life.

It's a story and a musical for Easter. The Christ-like figure of Valjean dies, but through his love, leaves a rich legacy behind. At his death Valjean tells us all that "*to love another person is to see the face of God,*" and those simple words are a summation of his life. And there is poor Javert, Judas-like, he puts an end to his own life. A man who can only see the world in black in white, at his death he sings "*And my thoughts fly apart, Can this man be believed? Shall his sins be forgiven? Shall his crimes be reprieved?*"

As I See It, the answers to Javert's anguished cries is a resounding YES! That's the hope I see in this musical. Perhaps it explains why the musical has broken all box office records in the past 25 years. For it offers the same Easter hope to humanity that Jesus did, that new life is always possible if we choose it no matter how desperate and dark life appears.

Jesus life, death and resurrections brings hope to all of us – *Les Miserables*.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.

Rev Tony Duncan

21 March 2010

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