

The Gospel According to Pixar sermon series

“Ratatouille”

[Philippians 3:12-14](#)

Starting with Toy Story last Sunday, we are spending the next few weeks examining the Gospel through the lens of Pixar films. Today, we are exploring the Gospel themes contained in the movie Ratatouille.

In this computer-animated comedy film from 2007, we are introduced to Remy, who is no ordinary rat. While all of his friends and family are perfectly fine surviving off of human garbage, Remy is not satisfied with being a scavenger. You see, Remy has a gift. He was born with a great sense of taste and smell. He is able to distinguish each of the ingredients in any food he tries. And because of this, he is very particular about what he eats and actually develops a passion for cooking. Remy can't help himself. He is ambitious. He wants to make things, instead of just taking them. He wants to make a difference in the world. He wants more than the life that he was born into. However, Remy's friends and family don't support his dreams. His dad warns him not to get any grand ideas, telling him, “This is the way things are. You can't change nature.” To which, Remy responds, “Change is nature, dad. The part that we can influence. And it starts when we decide.”

So, against his father's orders, Remy frequents a human kitchen. There, he reads a cookbook by Chef Gusteau, a master chef, and watches his cooking programs on TV. Inspired by the late 5-star chef, whose motto was that “Anyone can cook,” Remy gains a near expert level of knowledge about cooking, and he dreams of becoming a cook himself.

One day, Remy is abruptly separated from his family clan and ends up alone in Paris. By chance, he discovers Chef Gusteau's restaurant, which is now run by the former sous chef, named Skinner. There, he spots Linguini, a garbage boy, who is struggling in the kitchen. Remy sees him accidentally knock over a pot of soup and try to cover up the error by adding random ingredients to it. Instinctively, Remy knows the soup will taste terrible, so he gets to work trying to fix it. Let's take a look at the first clip. (*Show clip #1*)

As luck would have it, the soup that Remy rescues ends up being served to a food critic. And guess what? It's a huge hit, and Linguini's career as a chef is born! Of course, the catch is that Linguini does not know how to cook... But, Remy can. And so, they create an interesting system of communication to keep the ruse going. Remy sits on top of Linguini's head, hidden under his chef hat, and pulls on his hair to direct his hands and arms, as a puppeteer would move his puppet. Linguini appears to be the one cooking, but Remy is the real chef.

One night, a group of guests asks for a new dish from the kitchen. Chef Skinner, who is jealous and suspicious of Linguini's rise to fame, sets him up for failure by having him prepare one of Chef Gusteau's old recipes. What Linguini does not know is that the recipe was terrible. But, with Remy at the helm, Linguini is able to alter the recipe, and the new dish becomes another huge success. Let's take a look at the second clip. (*Show clip #2*)

Through the collaboration with his human friend, Remy is able to pursue his ambitions to become a master chef. He overcomes stumbling blocks that appear to be impossible. Who could imagine that Chef Gusteau's motto of "Anyone can cook" would even apply to a rat?

The word, ambition simply means a powerful desire to do or to achieve something, requiring determination and hard work. Ambition is beautifully captured in the movie, *Ratatouille*, as Remy strives to achieve his dreams. However, in general, the word, ambition has rather negative connotations. We typically associate it with seeking fame, wealth, and power. Being ambitious implies competition, a competition where we seek to be number one or to have more than our neighbors. So, naturally, with such negative images of ambition, people do not want to be perceived as being an ambitious person by others.

What about the Bible? What does the Bible have to say about ambition? In the New Testament, there are two Greek words that are translated as ambition: *eritheia* and *philotimeomai*. The first word, *eritheia*, has negative connotations and is translated as "selfish ambition" (Philippians 2:3) and "self-seeking" (Romans 2:8). But, the other word, *philotimeomai*, may be translated as "godly ambition." The goal of this kind of ambition is not to please oneself, but God. And, its emphasis is on others and God, rather than adding to oneself or one's own pride.

Remy's passion is to cook delicious food, using the special gift that he was born with of tasting and smelling things better than anyone else. His ambition is to create and add something new to this world, rather than passively going with the flow and following what everyone else is doing.

In his letter to Christians in Rome, Paul wrote, "I make it my ambition, my *philotimeomai* to preach the gospel..." (Romans 15:20, ESV). In another letter he wrote to Christians in Corinth, Paul said, "... We also have as our ambition, our *philotimeomai* ... to be pleasing to Him." (2 Corinthians 5:9, CEB). What is your *philotimeomai*? What is the God-given ambition which you have been gifted with? What is that thing which is burning in your heart? Perhaps it burned with great intensity once, but is now only a flicker. Maybe you were told to forget it; maybe you told yourself it was too impractical, too impossible. Was it something that would have changed the world? If it is your *philotimeomai*, the God-given ambition that has been gifted to you, the world is still waiting for the excellent and praiseworthy contribution only you can offer. And we all have something to offer, something we are called to share.

In the process of doing so, we must avoid the negative expressions of ambition which we too often see -- the expressions driven by self-seeking, self-promoting behavior. But, we must see that ambition is also a God-given gift. We must redeem our *eritheia*, those worldly ambitions, and reclaim them as *philotimeomai*, those godly ambitions which the world needs.

Remy, our unlikely hero, had many things working against him: his father's disapproval; the unacceptance and hostility of those who judged him for his appearance; communication barriers with those he had to work with; and those conspiring against him. But, through it all, he held onto his *philotimeomai*. He persevered. He pressed on, straining forward toward his passions and ambitions. Ultimately, his family comes around. Remy's ambition might not be their own, but they acknowledge his passion for food and support his ambition to be a chef. And, when Remy and Linguini are in trouble, Remy's father brings the entire rat colony to help them out. Let's take a look at the 3rd clip. (*Show clip #3*)

In today's scripture reading, Paul tells us, "Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." And, a curious thing happens when we hold steadfast to the ambition that God has placed in our hearts. When we persevere and we struggle toward our God-given dreams, our journeys intersect with those of others. Through the goodness of God, our strivings help to inspire those around us, people we never could have expected to reach.

We see this happen with the food critic Anton Ego, who was once determined to destroy Chef Gusteau's fame in the movie. This cold-hearted man is disarmed when he is served the dish Ratatouille. The simple, comfort food that Remy prepares for him sends him back to a place from his childhood memory. He's transported back to his mother's kitchen, where he ate plain, home-cooked meals and felt loved. A time when his heart was still warm and life was full of possibility. And so Anton Ego, the man who prided himself for writing career-ending food reviews, pens a favorable review of the rat chef. As a result, his reputation as a food critic is ruined. But the close of one chapter leads to the start of a new one. He becomes the main investor of Linguini and Remy's new restaurant and we see that he is happier than ever before.

In the final moments of the film, we find Anton Ego dining at Linguini and Remy's restaurant. Linguini asks Ego what he would like to order for dessert. Let's take a look at the last clip and see what he says. (*Show clip #4*)

"Surprise me!" What a great response this is! As we seek our *philotimeomai*, our God-given ambitions this new school year, may our lives be full of joyful, wonderful surprises God brings to us! Thanks be to God! Amen.