

***The Count of Monte Cristo* (April 2021)**

Director's Notes:

“Wait and hope:” the final words of Alexandre Dumas’ novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. What are we supposed to understand from them?

Betrayed and forgotten for 14 years, Edmond Dantes miraculously escapes from an impenetrable prison. Why was he betrayed and forgotten? And why 14 years of it? And what does it all have to do with you or me?

Our private sufferings often are unexplainably unfair and feel interminable. God offers no simplistic answer to our cries for mercy and release. Dumas attempts to answer with these words: Wait. Hope.

Those familiar with Old Testament stories will remember that God did not intervene *until* Abraham was ready to plunge a dagger into the son he loved; *until* the Israelites had broken their backs serving as Egyptian slaves for over 400 years; *until* they were terrorized by the Egyptians in hot pursuit behind them and the foaming Red Sea before them; *until* Job’s wealth was dissipated, his health ruined, and his sons and daughters slaughtered; *until* Joseph was ridiculed, bullied, beaten up, and sold into slavery by his own brothers and unjustly thrown into prison on a false accusation of adultery. THEN, God came to the rescue.

Perhaps the point of waiting and hoping is that we need to come to the place where it is abundantly clear that our deliverance is not of our own making, but is only because of divine intervention.

Edmond Dantes credits his own ingenuity for his escape, considering it his divine responsibility to exact revenge against those who betrayed him. He is diabolical in his orchestration of events that will cause the worst possible suffering for his betrayers in ways that will wound them the most. Is he playing God or the Devil? Freed from a physical prison, he creates a psychological prison where a desire for revenge eats away at his very soul.

The villainous characters of Villefort, Danglars, and Mondego find wealth, happiness, power, and prestige, but the treacherous choices they have made eventually become their undoing. Their stories warn us of the consequences of pride.

The Count of Monte Cristo is a story about forgiveness and redemption, pride and revenge, but also about the divine Knight in shining armor who rescues the repentant, but does not do so *until* we acknowledge that we are not the author of our deliverance. Although Dumas gives some implied twists at the end of his novel, the story ends with some ambiguity. It is intentional. What exactly happens to Edmond and Mercedes? Well, quite simply, that is another story. Boy-gets-girl-and-lives-happily-ever-after stories are not realistic. Redemption frees us from bondage to the prisons we have created, but not necessarily from the consequences of our choices. We are assured however, that

suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3-4).

So, until our deliverance comes, we wait. and hope.

– Tess McKinley, Director