

Cast Away (2000)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hrs 23 min.

Our contents ratings: Violence 2; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 1.

"It is not good that the man should be alone..."

Genesis 2:18a

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold;

I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

Psalms 69:1-3

FedEx is one of the modern miracles connecting us with points around the globe. When we first see him Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) is one of those at the center of its workings, a systems engineer constantly flying around the world fixing problems and urging his employees to work ever faster against the clock. And then in one horrible moment Chuck is plunged into a world in which clocks and schedules are of no value. The huge cargo plane goes down in a remote part of the Pacific Ocean, everyone but Chuck perishing in the crash. Chuck has no pocket knife or lighter, just the old railroad watch given him by his fiancé Kelly Frears (Helen Hunt) before they had reluctantly parted. Chuck reaches a tiny island, but here the watch would be of no value, even if it had not been water-

logged.

The exhausted cast away struggles to find food, water and shelter. He eagerly picks up some FedEx packages washed up in the surf, but the wet videotapes and legal papers they contain are of no help. Another package contains a pair of ice skates, seemingly of little value now. But later Chuck is able to use the shiny surface of the blades for a mirror, and their sharp edge serves as a cutting tool. Thanks at first to coconuts Chuck has food, and some other washed up debris is used to fashion a crude shelter. After arduous attempts, he even manages to start a fire. His physical needs are met, but his social and spiritual requirements prove more difficult. He obviously is not a religious person, for neither during the descent of the plane, nor during the moment when he buries the body of a crew member, do we see or hear him pray. Yet what was said of the first human in the ancient Creation story in Genesis holds true for Chuck—it “is not good for the man to be alone.” Chuck, unconsciously emulating the Creator, “creates” for himself a “helpmate.” It is a volleyball. Also, washed up in a FedEx parcel, again seemingly useless to Chuck at first, he paints features on its white surface, and dubs it Wilson, the name of the manufacturer. By cherishing the memory of his fiancé Helen and through frequent “conversations” with Wilson, Chuck holds back the dark night of isolation-induced madness. Freudians might say that Chuck projects himself onto the mute Wilson, but I prefer to see his unorthodox relationship to his “companion” more in terms of Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” concept. He endures the long years of isolation in the hope of being found and rescued—until the day when he realizes that if he is ever to leave the island, it will only be by his own efforts.

Cast Away is a tour de force of acting on the part of Tom Hanks, who goes from a full-fleshed beardless man to the emaciated bearded creature at the end of his ordeal. We come about as close to feeling the pain in his face and anguished eyes as we are ever likely to while watching a film. The film

is a tribute to the human spirit—but it also is revelatory of the secularity of many filmmakers today. The universe of director Robert Zemeckis and William Broyles is not one ruled over by a transcendent Being, but appears to be a closed system, with each of us dependent only on ourself for deliverance