

## 2021 03 21 – Minari

**John 12:20-33** (The Inclusive Bible)

Today is the fifth Sunday in Lent and for us that means it is also the last Sunday of this year's "Lenten Movie Series." When we began this series, I mentioned that COVID-19 caused a delay in the announcement of the nominees for the Academy Awards this year. The list finally became available this week. As it turns out, three of the films that we have discussed during Lent have been nominated for Best Picture, including *Minari*, today's movie.

*Minari*, is the story of a young South Korean couple and their two children as they move from California to Arkansas in the 1980's. The father, Jacob Yi, dreams of building a farm and supplying Korean immigrants with traditional vegetables from their homeland. Jacob has saved enough money to buy some land with a shed for his implements and an old trailer where the family will live. The movie begins with the long drive to their new home.

Very quickly it becomes obvious that his wife, Monica, does not share the excitement and the hope of Jacob's dream. All she can think about is what they have left behind. Monica feels the loss of her Korean community, the amenities of a large city and the financial security of their once growing savings account. She is dismayed by the old trailer that Jacob has purchased and worries about their son, David, who has a heart condition and is now many miles from a hospital.

The children's lives have also been turned upside down. Their parents are both earning extra money separating male and female chicks at a local hatchery. This means that Anne, their daughter, has increased responsibility for her younger brother. She experiences the sudden loss of her childhood. Six year old David, seems to be adjusting well at first; but then their grandmother arrives from Korea and ends up sleeping on a mat in David's bedroom. He struggles to accept this unwelcome intruder who has taken over his private space and turned his young life upside down.

The immigrant or refugee story is a familiar one. At bible study this week we talked about the experience of our own ancestors, immigrants from Europe who came to North America, over a century ago, in search of a new home. Some were escaping hunger or oppression, others were drawn by the promise of free land. We talked about the difficulties that they endured and the loss of home and culture that they would have felt. Five years ago this congregation welcomed the Etmeh family to Swift Current and helped them as they adapted to life in a new culture. And now we are raising funds to reunite them with some of their family.

As we all know, change and loss are inevitable in our lives. Sometimes, like Jacob, we get to choose when this happens, at other times, the need to let go is forced upon us. The Etmeh's were forced to leave their homeland, their culture, their families, and their livelihood because of fear for their very lives. Many of us have made the choice to leave everything we know in order to go to school or start a new job. Of course, we don't have to change our physical location to

experience loss. Death, aging, illness, broken relationships, a pandemic, marriage, and the birth or graduation of a child can all lead to change and loss.

In today's scripture reading, Jesus is letting go in the biggest way possible. He says, "Now the hour has come for the Chosen One to be glorified." The glory that he is talking about is not glory as the world would define it. It is, in fact, suffering and death. Jesus is recognizing that his death is both inevitable and imminent. It is inevitable because of the anger and fear his words and actions have stirred in the Jewish authorities. He knows that he will probably be arrested and killed within a few days. Jesus also believes that his death will have purpose. He believes it will bring about a new beginning for his followers and even for the world.

We too need to accept the eventual inevitability of our own death and, even more important, the recognition that life itself is a cycle of death and rebirth. Each loss we experience is a letting go or a death in our own life. And death is necessary for new life to occur. As Jesus put it,

The truth of the matter is,  
unless a grain of wheat  
falls on the ground and dies,  
it remains only a single grain;  
but if it dies,  
it yields a rich harvest.

When Jesus died, his disciples took on new roles and greater responsibility and they began to spread his Good News to an even wider audience and eventually the Christian church was born.

I am not suggesting that death and rebirth are easy. Jesus himself said, “Now my soul is troubled.” Of course he was troubled. In the other gospels, Jesus’ humanity and his fear is expressed through his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane when he pleads, “Abba...Take this cup away from me. But let it be not my will, but your will” (Mark 14:36). The author of the Gospel of John suggests that Jesus would never have made that request. Instead his Jesus says, “What will I say: ‘Abba, save me from this hour?’ But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.” I have to admit that I connect more with the Jesus who is afraid to let go. There is nothing more scary than letting go and especially if we are talking about life itself.

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Letting go is hard and every time someone or something in our life dies we go through a period of uncomfortable change, of pain and suffering. I read an article in *The Atlantic* magazine in which the author, Anne Cheng, writes about the film, *Minari*, by saying:

I want to bring attention to the film’s profound melancholia: its willingness to dwell within the utopia (the “no place”) of starting over. Freud defined melancholia as a state of stuckness, about living with a loss so impoverishing that it paradoxically enriches you. Being melancholic, then, isn’t just about having the blues; it’s also about holding on to a lack that feeds you. <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/02/minari-lee-isaac-chung-visual-melancholia-american-dream/618064/>

I think that description is beautiful. I believe that the emptiness, that “lack,” that occurs with change or loss, can create a space for the Spirit of God to enter. It is that Divine Love deep within us that “enriches”, that “feeds” us, when we are grieving. I believe that the Ground of our Being is at work even in the darkest, hardest, loneliest parts of our lives. That the Holy Mystery can bring something good and beautiful even out of suffering. I believe that God is at work using those moments for something good.

The name of this week’s movie is *Minari*. *Minari* is, in fact, the Korean name of an edible plant that is native to east Asia. David’s grandmother brings the seeds of this vegetable with her and plants them near a creek in the woods on Jacob’s land. When asked about the name of his film, the director, Lee Isaac Chung, said, “The interesting thing about it is that it’s a plant that will grow very strongly in its second season after it has died and come back.”

*Minari* is a film about change. It is a film about loss. It is film about God’s promise of new life even in death. May we all know and experience that promise. Amen.