

## 2022 03 06 – Belfast

**Luke 4:1-13** (The Inclusive Bible)

Today is the first Sunday in Lent and for us that means it is also the first Sunday of this year's Lenten Movie Series. This pilgrimage through popular cinema is an opportunity to theologically and spiritually explore some of the movies that have been nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. Today, we will be exploring a movie called *Belfast*. A few of us braved the snow on Friday afternoon to watch this movie at the church. How many of the rest of you have had a chance to see this film?

The movie is set in Belfast, Northern Ireland during a time of political and religious unrest between Catholics and Protestants. This time, in the latter part of the last century, was called The Troubles. The movie tells the story of a working-class Protestant family from the perspective of their 9-year-old son, Buddy. On the screen at the front of the church is a picture of Buddy's family sitting in a movie theatre. From your left to right they are: Ma, Pa, Granny, Buddy and his older brother Will. Missing from the picture is Buddy's grandfather, Pop. Pop was in hospital on this particular day when the family decided to go to the movies

*Belfast* begins with the riots of August 1969. We experience, through Buddy's eyes, shock and terror as a group of Protestant loyalists attack the homes and businesses of the Catholics on his family's street. This is the beginning of The Troubles and very quickly barricades are built, tanks and soldiers appear and lines of loyalty are firmly set.

We watch as a 9 year old boy tries to make sense of his life in this scary new reality. We watch as Buddy goes to church and listens to his Protestant minister preaching about a fork in the road, a fork where one path leads to heaven and the other to a fiery hell. And we watch as Buddy navigates a series of ethical dilemmas.

In one instance, Buddy has to decide whether the temptation of delicious milk chocolate is worth committing petty theft at Mr. Singh's corner store. In another he has to determine if getting the opportunity to sit beside a pretty blond classmate is a good enough reason to cheat on a math assignment. In a third situation, he has to decide whether to stay silent or tell the truth and get his friends in trouble. Buddy struggles to figure out which path is the right one to take.

In this movie, all the members of Buddy's family are struggling with hard decisions. His father, Pa, is currently working in England and is worried about the safety of his family. He is also being pressured to take sides and join the Protestants who are terrorizing his Catholic neighbours. Pa starts to wonder if leaving Belfast would be the best thing for his family. But Ma hates the thought of leaving the only home that she has ever known. And Will, the older brother, is being pressured to join the teenage gangs that have formed as a result of The Troubles.

In today's scripture passage, Jesus was also faced with difficult decisions. Like Buddy's family he was going through a challenging time. Jesus was alone in the

wilderness, he was famished and was, probably, also afraid. And the Devil came to him and said, “I could make your life a lot easier. You don’t need to be hungry. I can give you power and fame. All you have to do worship me.” But, the scripture tells us, that Jesus was able to resist these temptations.

He rebuked the Devil with quotes from his own Hebrew Scriptures, from the book of Deuteronomy. The Jewish people who first heard this story from the Gospel of Luke would have recognized their origin and would have realized that Jesus’ quotes referred to the Exodus, the 40 year journey that the Israelites took from slavery in Egypt to their Promised Land. During those 40 years, the Israelites relied totally on Yahweh, on God, for their food, their guidance and their comfort.

Just before he entered the wilderness, Jesus had been baptized and had heard the voice of God saying, “You are my Own, my Beloved.” He knew that he could trust in God’s love, just as the Israelites had learned to trust God during their time in the wilderness. Jesus knew that in times of trouble, he could find his sustenance, his guidance, his support from God, the Holy Mystery, the Spirit of Love. Jesus knew that he didn’t need to make a pact with the Devil.

And neither do we. We can also rely on God, the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love. Of course, we receive God’s providence, guidance and loving kindness in many different ways. Sometimes they come directly through prayer and meditation. But often these gifts from God come through family, friends, neighbours and even strangers.

In Buddy's case, he had his parents and his grandparents acting as conduits of God's grace. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that they were perfect. Like everyone one of us, they made mistakes in their lives and sometimes hurt those that they loved. But, for Buddy, his parents and grandparents were the rock that filled his life with love and security, guidance, and comfort.

Buddy learned about relationships by watching the way his Pop held his Granny and how his parents looked at each other while they danced. He learned about nurturing love from the actions of the women in his life. And he learned many life-lessons from his "deep-thinking" Pop.

One day, while Buddy was working on long division, Pop suggested that if he wasn't sure of the answer he could make his numbers less clear so a 7 looked like a 1 or a 6 like a 2 and, in that way, keep his teacher guessing. Buddy asked, "But sure there's only one right answer." And his Pop replied, "If that were true, son, people wouldn't be blowing themselves up all over this town." As someone who studied mathematics I have to admit that one of things I love about the discipline is that there is only one right answer. And I'm not suggesting that cheating on a math assignment is a good idea. But Buddy's grandfather certainly understood the reality of this world: that one person's truth can legitimately be different from another's.

We each have to determine our own truth. And whatever that truth is it needs to be based in love: love of God, love of neighbor, love of family and love of ourselves. In the movie, *Belfast*, this truth was made known in many ways, but it

was through music that is was spoken loud and clear. In a key scene, we watch as Buddy's parents, their family and friends dance in the streets to a popular song of that era called "Everlasting Love." I'll end with these words from the chorus:

Open up your eyes, then you'll realize here I stand

With my everlasting love

Need you by my side, girl you'll be my bride

You'll never be denied everlasting love

From the very start, open up your heart

Be a lasting part of everlasting love

Real love will last forever

From *Everlasting Love* by Love Affair

May it be so. Amen.