

## **March 5, 2017 – La La Land**

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

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 were nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. Of course, Lent started so late this year, the awards are already over and we know who won. Which film received the Best Picture Award this year? (*wait for answer*) That's right it was "Moonlight." We will be talking about that film next week. But today we are beginning with a movie called "La La Land." How many of you have had a chance to see the show?

La La Land is a romantic musical set in modern day Los Angeles. It is the story of Mia, an aspiring actress, and Sebastian, a dedicated jazz musician. When they meet, they are both struggling to survive while attempting to pursue their dreams in La La Land. As the movie progresses, we see their relationship grow; but their careers seem to be at a standstill.

Eventually opportunities arise and they both have choices to make that are associated with their careers, choices that could mean a long separation and possibly the end of their relationship. Should Sebastian go and tour with a popular band who's music he doesn't like or even respect? Yes, it would be a regular pay cheque, but it's not the kind of jazz that he wants to play. Should Mia

take a role that would mean months of filming in Paris, France? This role could be the chance of a lifetime, but would their relationship survive so much time apart? Sebastian and Mia were torn between their love for each other and their unfulfilled dreams.

How many times have you been faced with a choice that could totally change the direction of your life? A choice that could hurt the people you love, that could impact your ability to earn a living, a choice that could change how you were viewed by your friends and family. Sometimes they are split second decisions, choices that we make without even realizing the impact they may have.

Sometimes they are choices that we agonize over for months or even years.

When these choices come up in our lives how do we decide which way to go?

In today's scripture passage, Jesus is also given choices. Like Sebastian and Mia these choices come at the beginning of his career. He has just been baptized by his cousin, John. This is the same cousin who has been introducing Jesus as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Jesus' rocket to fame is just about to take off when instead the Spirit leads him into the wilderness, into the desert. And there, after Jesus has fasted for many days, the devil comes to tempt him. Three times Jesus is given a choice, he can use his God-given gifts to turn stone into bread, he can jump off a tower and wait for God to save him or he can give his soul to the devil and gain all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus is offered bread, glory and power and each time he says, "No."

But why does he say, “No.” He was hungry, so what’s wrong with eating some bread. What was wrong with showing people that God loved him enough to save him? What was wrong with having some wealth or power? The answer is nothing. There is nothing inherently wrong with food or fame, money or glory, success or power. These can all be good things. Jesus said, “No,” because there was a still, small voice deep inside him guiding his answer. Jesus said, “No,” because in his heart, in his soul, in his mind, he knew that saying “Yes,” would take him down a path he didn’t want to go. Jesus said, “No,” because, for him, saying “Yes” to the devil tempter would mean saying “No” to the Ground of his Being, to the Essence of Love..

When we have choices to make in our lives, then the question we have to ask ourselves is, “Why?” Why do we want to say, “Yes,” or why do we want to say, “No.” Where is the impetus coming from? Is it coming from all the voices in our head: the voices of our childhood, the voices of our friends, the voices of popular media? Are we hearing the latest TV or radio advertisement? Are we listening to our ego’s need for security or power or recognition? Are we listening to our fears or anxieties? Or are we listening to that sacred voice, that still small voice within each of us that is our authentic, our true self?

La La Land is a great movie. It is full of wonderful music, amazing choreography, incredible sets and beautiful people. But what makes La La Land an award-winning movie is that its plot doesn’t follow the normal trajectory of a Hollywood romance. Damien Chazelle, the writer and director, leaves lots of questions

unanswered. For instance, we don't know why Sebastian and Mia make the choices that they make. We know that their dreams are important to them. We know that Sebastian wants to run his own jazz club. We know that Mia wants to be a successful actress. But we don't know whether they are following their bliss, their need to use their God-given gifts to make a difference in the world or if their drive to succeed comes from another place. Sometimes it seems like they are motivated by their art: Sebastian obviously loves jazz and is enthusiastic about keeping it going in its purest form. Mia works hard to get a acting role, going to one gut-wrenching audition after another. But where does their motivation come from? Does it come from the head, the ego, or does it come from the soul?

In the film Sebastian and Mia both say, "Yes," to the choices that will keep them apart for an extended period of time, they both make decisions that will stress their relationship. I'm not going to tell you how the movie ends. I'm not going to suggest that their choices were right or wrong. I don't know if they were made from a place of authenticity and true knowing or if they were made from a need for security or wealth or fame or power. All I know is that the choices they made altered the course of their lives.

And so, may the choices that we make in our lives be made with love and courage and from a holy place that honours who we are meant to be in the world.