

February 25, 2018 – Lady Bird

Mark 1:9-15

Today is the second Sunday in Lent and for us that means it is also the second Sunday of this year's "Lenten Movie Series." Today we will be reflecting on the film, *Lady Bird*. This movie was showing in Gull Lake a few weeks ago, so some of you may have had a chance to see it, but in case you haven't, I'm going to tell you a little bit about it.

Lady Bird it is a coming-of-age story. It is about a high-school senior named Christine McPherson and her difficult relationship with her mother. First, we need to note that Christine has decided that her name is boring and insists that everyone call her "Lady Bird." Lady Bird is bright and talented, but filled with more than her share of teenage angst. During the movie we feel her pain as she experiences a multitude of adolescent crises. Her first serious boyfriend turns out to be gay. Her follow-up relationship is with a self-absorbed young man who basically uses her. She has a terrible falling out with her best friend, and then takes up with a superficial "cool" girl whom she tries desperately to impress.

Like so many teenagers, Lady Bird is frantically trying to find herself and is convinced that the only way she can do that is by leaving her home in "boring" Sacramento and studying at a university on the "more cultured" east coast. She comes from a middle-class family, but her father has just lost his job and her mother is now working double shifts to keep them financially afloat. Lady Bird's

dream seems unreachable in their current financial situation so her mother forbids her from applying to universities outside of California. In the movie, Lady Bird's relationship with her mother is incredibly complex. We see some moments of deep emotional connection and many episodes where her mother is expressing, sometimes in harsh language, a deep disappointment in Lady Bird's work ethic, her grades, her appearance and in her lack of gratitude for what she has been given.

Teenage years are often painful and turbulent times because of all the changes that we go through in our bodies, in our minds, and in our lives. Some of you may be able to connect with Lady Bird's angst as you think of your own experiences as a teenager OR you may have more empathy for Lady's Bird mother as you remember what it was like to parent adolescent children. I know I was never as rebellious as Lady Bird but I do remember turning fourteen and feeling like my mother had a lot to learn and it was my job to tell her what she was doing wrong.

As I was reading the scripture for this Sunday, I couldn't help but notice the lack of information that we have about Jesus as a teenager. In the gospel of Mark, he just shows up as a grown man. The first time we meet him the scripture says, "It was then that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan River by John." At that point he was already around 30 years old.

At least the gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with a birth story and in Luke we get a glimpse into his childhood with a story of Jesus at 12 years of age. In this

passage from Luke, Jesus' family travels to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and then discovers, as they are walking home, that Jesus has been left behind.

Three days later, his parents find him in the temple sitting with the rabbis asking questions. Mary says, "Son, why have you done this to us?" and Jesus responds, "Why were looking for me? Did you not know I had to be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:41-52) If Jesus was that precocious at twelve years of age, imagine what he was like as a teenager. He must have given his parents a run for their money.

Greta Gerwig, the author and director of this movie, said that when she was writing "Lady Bird," she thought a lot about what saints were like as teenagers. She figured at that point in their lives they were probably just like everyone else... troublemakers without a worthy cause. <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2017/10/26/greta-gerwigs-lady-bird-rallying-cry-catholic-schoolgirls-everywhere>

No one begins their life as a saint, or a teacher, or a leader, a judge or even a carpenter or a plumber. We all have to go through multiple stages of growth.

So what is it that turns tormented and tormenting teenagers into responsible, loving adults or even saints? What is it that turned a precocious 12 year old Jesus into a spirit-filled healer, teacher and leader? What is it that allows each one of us to turn our lives around when we are lost or confused or even broken?

I believe today's film gives us glimpse into that process. Greta Gerwig explains her movie this way, she says, "I was so interested in...taking something that just looks like...an annoying teenage girl and then giving her the experience of what I

think of as grace.” Grace. Grace is that inexplicable and unearned gift of love, forgiveness, and acceptance that originates from God. It originates from the Holy Spirit but we often experience grace through other people, animals, birds, plants, from all parts of God’s creation.

In this movie we see grace in the way that a nun at Lady Bird’s catholic school responds with love and humour when her car is decorated and a sign with the words “married to Jesus” is stuck on the back. In this movie we see grace in the way that Lady Bird is able to forgive and even console her ex-boyfriend when he apologizes and then breaks down as he shares his fear of coming out to his family and friends. In this movie we see grace in her best friend’s willingness to forgive Lady Bird when she comes back to rekindle their relationship. By the end of the movie we see a change in this young woman and realize that Lady Bird has awakened to the presence of God’s grace in her life.

As Christians, we celebrate the sacraments, both baptism and communion as we remember the presence of God’s love and mercy in our lives. These sacraments are “visible signs of an invisible grace.” In today’s scripture we read that Jesus began his ministry first by being baptized and then by spending forty days in the wilderness. In his baptism, Jesus was named as God’s beloved son and while he was in the wilderness the angels came and looked after him. Through these moments of caring and love Jesus was assured that God’s grace was, and would always be, with him.

It’s sometimes hard to remember that we are all surrounded by God’s grace –

that God's love, forgiveness and acceptance is with us in both the good and the not so good times in our lives. But it is and may we all learn to live in that love. I want to finish today with a short poem. It is written by Denise Levertov and is called, "The Avowal."

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.