

2020 03 01 – Parasite

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. This year, our first movie also happens to be the winner. To the delight of many theatre-goers the film that received the Oscar for Best Picture is a South Korean movie called *Parasite*. How many of you have had a chance to see this movie?

Parasite is the story of the Kim family: father Ki-taek, mother Chung-sook, adult daughter Ki-jung and adult son Ki-woo. They live together in a cramped, bug-infested, semi-basement apartment. None of them have a permanent job and they are struggling to make ends meet. At the beginning of the movie we see them folding pizza boxes to make a little money and we watch the young people scrambling to find free WI-FI so they can stay connected to the Internet. Like Jesus in the wilderness, the Kim family are hungry. They are hungry in every sense of the word: hungry for food, hungry for a job, hungry for status, hungry for a way out of their predicament.

Then, through a friend, Ki-woo gets an opportunity to take a job as an English tutor to the teenage daughter of a wealthy family called the Parks. In order to apply for the job Ki-woo has to lie about his qualifications, but his friend has given him a glowing recommendation so he is readily accepted. Over the next few

days and weeks, the Kim family begins to infiltrate the home of the Parks by recommending each other's services, posing as unrelated but skilled and experienced workers. Soon Ki-jung, the daughter, is acting as an art therapist for the Parks young son, Ki-taek has been hired as Mr. Park's chauffeur and Chung-sook is the family's new housekeeper. The first half of the movie is a fast and hilarious ride as we watch how the Kim's scheme their way into the home and the lives of the Parks.

One of the most obvious themes in this movie is the huge disparity between the lives of these two families. In contrast to the Kim's basement dwelling, the Parks live high on a hill, safely ensconced behind high fences and a locked gate. They have a green lawn and a house built by a famous architect, a house that is large, light-filled and spotlessly clean. The husband owns a very successful technology firm and travels all over the world. This movie highlights the ever-expanding gap between the rich and the poor. Throughout the movie, the director brilliantly uses long, steep staircases to emphasize the up and down movement between these two realities.

But as the movie proceeds, it's not clear whether we should be cheering for the Kim's as they claw their way out of poverty or whether we should be gasping in dismay at the tactics they use to gain access to this new world. Suffice it to say that other people's lives are destroyed as they make their way up the staircase. Unlike Jesus, who refused to make bread out of stone, the Kims seem content to use whatever device is necessary to obtain the food, the money and the security that they desire.

This is a movie where it's hard to figure out who's the "good guy" and who's the "bad guy." The Parks, in their mansion on the hill, are certainly not portrayed as the villains. They may be oblivious to the plight of the poor and gullible in their choices but they are not vicious or mean, in fact, their new employees comment on how "nice" they are. So, even though we usually want to cheer for the underdog, the poorer folk, the ones who are trying to better their situation, in this movie, it's hard to know who to applaud – both families, or neither?.

In the same way, it's not obvious who the movie is named after: which family is the parasite and whose life-blood is being sucked away? At first, it seems obvious that the Kims are the parasites living off the wealth of this family on the hill. But then we start to see that the Parks are also parasites. The life that they live is totally dependent on the labour of the Kims, people they know nothing about, people they have no desire to connect with in any meaningful way. Both families are using the other as a way to support their dream of the ideal lifestyle, a lifestyle built on wealth and consumption. And for a short while, it seems as if they are both going to get their wish... each family living off the other.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/media/who-s-parasite>

Then, just when life is looking good for the Kim family, their deception-filled world starts falling apart. I'm not going to tell you how the movie ends, but I will say that it isn't pretty. Their world doesn't tumble neatly; it crashes and smashes into little pieces taking the Park's idyllic lifestyle along for the ride. There is no tidy ending with the protagonist winning the day and walking off into the sunset.

There is no tidy ending because the writer and director, Bong Joon-ho, knows that the world that we live in isn't tidy; it isn't OK. We live in a world built on the belief that money and power will make us happy. Here in North America we still believe in the "American Dream," this idea that if we work hard enough we can be rich and successful, and that achievement will give us joy. We live in a world where, despite evidence to the contrary, people still believe that capitalism will create a society where all will get what they deserve. But *Parasite* illustrates the fallacy of this belief.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus chose to believe in something different. When the Devil offered Jesus all the dominions of the world if he would just fall down and worship him, Jesus answered, "Scripture says, 'You will worship the Most High God; God alone will you adore.'" Jesus believed in and trusted a God of love, a God he called Abba (daddy). Jesus knew that happiness and joy comes from love and mutual relationships, not from money or power. Jesus came to tell us the good news of the reign of God, a world view built on the love of neighbour, a society built on justice and peace, not on fame and success.

When we believe in God, when we put our trust in the power of love, then we know that we are God's children and that we are already enough. We are able to recognize that God's world is wondrous and what we have is enough. We are able and willing to share what we have with others. When we trust in the God of Love then we can build a world where no one, rich or poor, is a parasite and all can live in justice and peace. It is amazing what the love of God can do!