

2022 03 06 – Don't Look Up

Luke 13:31-35 (The Inclusive Bible)

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. 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's movie is called *Don't Look Up*.

Don't Look Up is a satire. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a satire is a type of literary work that has been created to "hold up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn." Satire uses techniques such as keen wit, irony, and sarcasm. I'll be honest, it's not my favourite kind of movie. But I do respect the message that this movie is trying to put across.

Don't Look Up is set in today's world and it begins as Kate Dibiasky, an astronomy grad student, and her professor, Dr. Randall Mindy, make the astonishing discovery of a comet travelling within our solar system. This comet is extremely large and it is on a collision course with Earth. Its impact, in just six months, would be an extinction level event for all life on the planet. These two astronomers immediately realize that they need to share this devastating news.

Before they know it, they are in the oval office. But the President of the United States is more interested in the upcoming midterm elections than anything Kate or Randall have to say. When she is warned that world leaders need to do everything possible to divert the comet from its path, the President decides to sit

tight and assess. She says, "You cannot go around saying to people that there's a 100% chance that they're going to die." In fact, her administration creates a media campaign of its own with the slogan "Don't Look Up," assuring the masses that they have nothing to worry about. At one point we see the President wearing a ball cap with the slogan embroidered on the front, "Don't Look Up."

When the White House refuses to help, Kate and Randall embark on a media tour and end up on a TV show where the hosts have been told to "keep it light and fun." Their catastrophic message is met with jokes and sexual innuendo. In frustration, Kate screams and yells and her angry face ends up as a meme on social media.

A billionaire with a lot of pull in the White House realizes that the comet could contain priceless minerals. As it turns out, NASA already has a plan to send a rocket up that will totally destroy the comet. But this corporate mogul persuades the White House to use a much riskier manoeuvre to try and break up the comet into smaller pieces that could safely fall to Earth. What's not clear is whether this new plan will work.

This may be a satire, and the situation may be exaggerated, but we all know that climate change is real and that the warnings of our scientists have been ignored by many governments and corporations for decades. We are also familiar with the disbelief and the conspiracy theories that our health professionals have endured during the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of these modern day prophets is very similar to those of 2000 years ago.

In today's scripture passage Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. In the towns and cities along the way, he is sharing the world-changing news of God's realm of peace and justice. He is preaching goods new to the poor. He is healing the sick and giving sight to the blind. But, like modern-day prophets, Jesus' message is not appreciated by those in leadership positions. They don't want to see any change that could weaken their powerful grip on the people of Galilee and Judea.

So today's reading begins with some Pharisees coming to Jesus and saying, "You need to get out of town, and fast. Herod is trying to kill you." Jesus, of course, is familiar with King Herod's tendency for violence. His cousin, John, has already died at the hands of this man's family. But Jesus also knows that his message and his ministry is vital to the spiritual, mental and physical well-being of his people and so he replies, "Go tell that fox, 'Today and tomorrow, I'll be casting out devils and healing people, and on the third day I'll reach my goal.'"

Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish religion, the home of their temple was also famous as a place where Jewish prophets were killed. In today's reading Jesus goes on to lament the fate of Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you!" And Jesus foretells the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and, in particular the holy temple. He says, "So take note: your house will be left to you desolate."

Like the scientists in today's movie, Jesus is concerned about what will happen if no one listens to his message of peace. And so he continues on to Jerusalem despite the warnings of the Pharisees, despite the history of the city itself. In fact, even as he laments the city's violence and ignorance he expresses his love and compassion for those who live there. He says, "How often have I wanted to

gather your children together as a mother bird collects her babies under her wings—yet you refuse me!”

We live in God’s wonderful world. We live on a planet of abundance and beauty. We live in an environment created by the Spirit of Love. And yet, we refuse to listen when the Holy Mystery, through the voices of modern-day prophets, implores us to take care of our planet Earth. Adam MacKay, the writer and director of this movie, said, “I’ve been really terrified about the climate, the collapse of the livable atmosphere. It seems to be getting faster and faster. Yet for some reason, it’s not penetrating our culture.” This movie was his response.

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/29113/dont-look-up>

What will our response be? What can we do here in Swift Current to care for the Earth? Our Faith Formation Committee has already begun by sending books and letters to representatives in our local, provincial and federal governments. And now a group called *Earthcare Partners* is forming within our congregation. We are looking for ways to make a difference here in our own city. We have talked about gardening, composting, recycling, zero-scaping and other ways to “live with respect in creation.” Our latest idea—the planting of mini-forests—comes from a recent article in the United Church’s Broadview magazine. I invite you come and join us as we move forward to make a difference.

The movie, *Don’t Look Up*, has received rather mixed reviews. People seem to either love it or hate it. One reviewer suggested that “satire doesn’t always immediately land. Sometimes we’re too close to it to see how effective it is.” That’s the feeling I get with this movie. Maybe it is landing a little too close to

home. Maybe it didn't seem funny because it is a little too real.

<https://lifelacker.com/12-of-the-best-satirical-movies-that-arent-dont-look-up-1848288972>

In one of the last scenes in the movie a group of family and friends gather around a supper table. Before they begin someone at the table offers a prayer beginning with the following words:

Dearest Father and Almighty Creator,
we ask for Your grace, despite our pride.
Your forgiveness, despite our doubt.
Most of all, Lord, we ask for Your love
to soothe us through these dark times.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11286314/characters/nm3154303>

I would add

Give us ears to hear your prophets
and the strength and courage
to do what needs to be done
to care for Your creation.
Amen.