

2022 03 27 – Dune

Luke 4:14-21 (The Inclusive Bible)

Today is the fourth Sunday in Lent and for us that means it is also the fourth Sunday of this year's Lenten Movie Series. Every year I eagerly anticipate the announcement of the nominations for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. First, I review the list to see which ones I have watched. This year, when the list came out, I realized I hadn't seen any of them. Then I check to see which ones are available for us to watch online (that usually eliminates a few). Finally, I Google the movies and look for themes that would be appropriate for the Lenten season. This year I ended up with five movies in five different genres. So far we've watched *Belfast*, a family drama, *Don't Look Up* a scathing satire and *The Power of the Dog* a psychological western. This week's movie is based on a science fiction novel, and both the movie and the novel are called *Dune*.

Dune is set twenty thousand years in the future. It is the story of a young man named Paul Atreides (the central, and largest, figure in the picture on the screen). Paul is the son of Leto the Duke of the thriving House of Atreides. They live and rule on a beautiful ocean planet named Caladan.

The movie begins with the House of Atreides receiving a decree from the Emperor of the Known Universe. Leto is to take over as ruler of Arrakis, a harsh desert planet famous as the only source of a very valuable substance called "spice." Spice is a drug that heightens vitality and expands the consciousness of

the person who ingests it. It is also required for the navigation of interstellar space. There is nothing more valuable in the universe.

Arrakis, for the past eighty years, has been under the control of the brutal House of Harkonnen. The Harkonnens have become extremely rich from harvesting spice and, at the same time, have been cruel oppressors of the planet's Indigenous population, a people of the desert, known as the Fremen. Leto agrees to become the new ruler of Arrakis, hoping to gain a mutual alliance with these desert people, but knowing that the House of Harkonnen will probably not give up control without a fight.

The film then goes on to show us what happens when the House of Atreides arrives on Arrakis. The story contains heart-breaking betrayal, incredible battles and amazing resilience, but, for me, the most fascinating aspect of the film is watching as Paul Atreides tries to figure out who he is and what his role will be in the future of the House of Atreides, Arrakis, the Fremen and even the Universe.

Paul is an incredibly talented and skilled young man. He has been trained by the best scholars and warriors in his father's house. But he also has gifts that come from his mother, the Lady Jessica. These abilities are connected to the mystical side of the universe. He sees dreams that seem to come from the future and he is developing the ability to control other people with his voice. And finally there is a group of powerful women, called the Bene Gesserit who have a special interest in Paul's future. They refer to him as the One, the Messiah.

Paul sees himself in his dreams; he knows what the Bene Gesserit are saying about him; and he even hears the Fremen refer to him as “Lisan al-Gaib,” (the Voice of the Outer-World). But he doesn’t understand what it all means. He’s not sure that he likes the idea of being different, of having special powers and a pre-determined role. Paul’s father wants him to be the next Duke of The House of Atreides and he’s not sure that’s who he wants to be either. What path is Paul going to take? What is his true calling?

This is a question that all of us have to answer at various points in our lives. How do we know which path to take? How do we know which voice to listen to? Sometimes it’s really hard to determine, isn’t it! Too often we make choices based on our ego, our greed, our even our fear. Sometimes, like Paul, we find ourselves moving towards someone else’s dream for us. How do we know when the call is true and the path is our own?

I know, from personal experience, that the discernment process can be long and somewhat convoluted. And I also know that a true call has to come from within. There may be other people giving us the guidance and the “nudges” we need to stay the course; but the final decision has to be our own. And that final decision has to come from that place within each one of us where the Sacred dwells. A true call is a decision based in love: love of God, love of self and love of others.

Paul was getting lots of nudges: through dreams, through the Bene Gesserit, through his parents and even from the Fremen; but what wasn’t clear was whether the source of his calling was Sacred. The film uses religious language

and references ideas from more than one faith, but, what it doesn't do is talk about the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love. Paul is referred to as the One, the Messiah but what kind of Messiah do the Bene Gesserit think he is going to be?

Jesus was also known as The Anointed One, The Messiah. He came into the world at a time when his people were being cruelly oppressed by the Romans. The Israelites had dreamt of a Messiah for generations. They dreamt of a warrior like King David who would come and free them from bondage. They dreamt of a time of freedom, prosperity and wealth.

Jesus wasn't exactly the Messiah they had expected. He came with no army, just a motley crew of disciples. He came with no weapons, just a gift for teaching and healing. He came with no power to control, just a passion for peace and justice. As the Gospel of Luke tells us, Jesus came to:

- to bring Good News to those who are poor.
- to proclaim liberty to those held captive
 - recovery of sight to the blind, and
 - release to those in prison
- to proclaim the year of our God's favour.

Jesus' call came directly from his Father God, the Mother of all that is, the Holy Spirit. His call was for justice and his method was a non-violent revolution. This is the Messiah that is waiting for us in the streets. This is the Messiah that we are called to follow.

I don't know where Paul Atreides' call will take him. That probably won't be clear until Dune, Part Two appears in October, 2023. But I fear that he is going down a path of hatred and violence. I hope I am proved wrong.

His is a fictional life on a fictional planet in a fictional universe, but our lives are real and are being lived each moment of every day. May we follow the Messiah that lived on this earth over 2000 years ago and still lives in our hearts today. May we follow Jesus' call of peace and justice. May we find our true calling and be who we are meant to be. Amen.