

## 2023 03 05 – The Banshees of Inisherin

**Scripture:** John 3:1-17 (The Inclusive Bible)

Today is the Second Sunday of 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, we will be exploring a movie called *The Banshees of Inisherin*. About 10 of us watched the movie on Friday afternoon here at the church and I know a few of you probably watched it at home. How many of you have had a chance to see this film?

*The Banshees of Inisherin* is the story of two men on the fictional island of Inisherin off the coast of Ireland. These two men, Pádraic (Paw-rick) and Colm have been friends for years. Every week-day afternoon, like clockwork, they meet in the local pub for a beer and a chat. Pádraic is a well-meaning but dim-witted farmer and Colm is a folk musician a couple of decades older than his friend.

One day, Colm announces that he wants nothing to do with Pádraic saying, "I just don't like you no more." He tells Pádraic to never talk to him again. Pádraic is, of course, confused. He assumes he must have done or said something to offend Colm, but he doesn't know what it could be. Pádraic can't help himself and he goes and questions his friend, trying to understand what is happening.

Colm eventually admits that he is coming to terms with his own mortality and is concerned about the legacy that he is leaving. Colm wants to be remembered and he believes that the way to do that is by writing a memorable song. He says, "I think I need to spend the time I have left thinking and composing." He tells Pádraic that he finds his chatter dull and aimless. Colm says, "None of it helps me."

There are, of course, other characters in this movie watching as this friendship falls apart. Padraic's sister, Siobhan (Shi-von), believes that Colm is being incredibly selfish and even wonders if he is clinically depressed, but tells her brother that he needs to respect Colm's wishes. Padraic's younger friend, Dominic, when he hears about Colm's sudden decision asks, "what is he... 12?" And even the Catholic priest admonishes Colm saying the way he is treating Padraic is "not very nice." No can believe that Colm is being this cruel to the good-natured Padraic.

How we treat others can sometimes be unkind and even painful, can't it?

Friendships end, marriages break up, families split, and friends and acquaintances take sides. These are not unusual circumstances. Sometimes the reasons for the split are obvious, sometimes they are not. In every case feelings are hurt and often anger and retaliation follow the initial breakup. In fact, before you know it the rage and fighting can take over and begin to feed on themselves.

The same can be said for countries who are at war. Often, once the fighting begins, the two sides forget what the initial spat was about and the motivation becomes winning the war, instead of resolving the conflict. Humanity's penchant for violence and revenge is well-documented and this movie is no exception.

In *The Banshees of Inisherin*, Pádraic continues to struggle with the loss of his friend and continues to ignore Colm's request for silence. Eventually Colm gives him an ultimatum that he hopes Pádraic will understand. Colm tells him that he will cut off a finger on his own left hand, his fiddle hand, each time Pádraic speaks to him. Sadly, Pádraic decides to test and see if Colm's threat is serious and discovers that, in fact, it is. With this act of self-mutilation the emotions and the violence begin to escalate. Even Pádraic, begins to change and to act on his anger and jealousy. Eventually his friend Dominic says, "I used to think you were the nicest of them. Now you're just the same as them."

Yes we are all human and every one of us has within us the ability to feel pain and to inflict pain on others. So what is it that keeps us from regressing into violence at every turn? What is it that keeps us from hurting ourselves to spite our enemy? What is it that keeps us from starting a war with our neighbour? The answer is love. The knowledge that we are loved and that we are called to love others. As Christians, we turn to Jesus and to scripture for the guidance and the support that we need to live love in this world.

Jesus was well aware of humanity's penchant for selfishness and revenge, for violence and war. In fact, in today's scripture, Nicodemus comes to visit Jesus in the dark because he knows that many of his fellow Pharisees are jealous of Jesus and are angry at this popular rabbi. So much so, that they are starting to come up with ways to get rid of him. Jesus knows that his life is in danger.

He knows that others are threatened by his ministry, but Jesus continues to preach a gospel of love. He preaches about the saving and transforming power of the Spirit of Love when he says:

“The wind blows where it will.

You hear the sound it makes,

but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

To be born of the Spirit, to be born again, is to be transformed by the love of God. It is the power of love that can keep us from turning to anger and violence every time we are hurt or in pain. That grace-filled Spirit can heal and renew even the most broken of our souls.

While watching *The Banshees of Inisherin*, I kept looking for grace, for love, for forgiveness. I couldn't find it. This movie is a cautionary tale of what can happen when the Spirit of Love is not allowed to do its work. The message of this film became especially clear when I realized that the name Siobhan means God's grace or God is gracious. In the movie Padraic's sister, Siobhan, literally leaves Inisherin. It was as if God had abandoned the people of the island.

But you and I know that we are never abandoned. God's love, God's amazing grace is with us wherever we are. We are not alone. It is in our darkest times that God's presence is often felt most strongly. Sometimes God comes to us in others, sometimes God comes to us from within.

As we know, wars do eventually end. In fact, this movie is set in 1923, at a time when the civil war in Ireland is coming to an end. The people on Inisherin are close enough to hear the cannons and the rifles. They are aware of the conflict, but are not personally involved.

Just as wars always end, I believe that reconciliation is always possible. I believe that Colm and Pádraic will find a way to end their fighting too. They may even become close friends again. Healing may come through a friend, or a family member, who assures each one of them that they are loved. Healing may come through the animals that both of them care about. Healing may even come from the church that both of them attend.

In today's scripture we read:

God sent the Only Begotten into the world  
not to condemn the world,  
but that through the Only Begotten  
the world might be saved.

May we all believe in the transforming power of God's love. May we all know the gift of God's amazing grace. May it be so. Amen.