

2023 03 12 – The Fablemans

Scripture: Samuel 16:1-13 (The Inclusive Bible)

Today is the Third Sunday of Lent and for us that means it is also the third Sunday of this year's Lenten Movie Series. Each film in the series is one that has been nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. In fact, tonight the winner of the Oscar will be announced. But, for now, it is still a mystery, and this morning, we will be exploring just one of the contenders, a movie called *The Fablemans*. I think those of us who watched it on Friday will agree that this is probably the most enjoyable movie that we have watched so far this year. It was certainly a little upbeat than the last two.

The Fablemans is a coming-of-age drama loosely based on the life of the film's co-writer and director, Steven Spielberg. In the film, his fictional name is Sam Fableman. As the story begins, Sam is living in New Jersey in the 1950's with his Jewish parents, and his younger sisters. The movie opens with his parents, Burt and Mitzi, taking young Sam to see his first movie.

As the picture on the screen suggests, Sam was enthralled with the movie, in particular, with a scene where a train crashes into a car causing a major disaster. Sam decides he wants a train set for Hanukkah and proceeds to reproduce the crash in the family's basement, eventually even filming it with his dad's 8mm camera. This begins Sam's obsession with making movies.

Sams's father, Burt, is an electrical engineer a brilliant man who will eventually make a big impact in the new and exciting field of computing. Burt sees Sam's interest in movie-making as a hobby, and assumes that he will outgrow it and eventually become a scientist, like himself. Sam's mother, Mitzi, is an accomplished concert pianist who has sidelined much of her career in order to raise her family. She sees her son as a budding artist and does whatever she can to encourage his interest in movie-making. This polarization of art and science becomes one of the major themes in the movie.

Burt's job takes the family first to Arizona and eventually to California. By the time they arrive in "the golden state" Sam is in his last year of high school and struggles to fit into his new environment. Even in New Jersey, Sam realized that his family was different—theirs was the only house in their neighbourhood with no Christmas lights. But it is in California that he first experiences physical bullying and anti-semitic slurs. Two of the school's lettered athletes take it as their job to make Sam's life miserable. In one scene they even suggest that he needs to apologize for killing Jesus.

I wish this type of bullying was something that no longer existed, but, as we all know, people still struggle to accept those who are different. The differences could be in race, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, family configuration, cultural background, education or even economic circumstances. In the film Sam is bullied because of his culture and religion. His own father struggles with his identity as an artist and his schoolmates make fun of him because he isn't good at sports. Bullying is still very real and so are many forms

of prejudice, discrimination, and systemic racism. In all cases, family, friends, neighbours, and especially strangers are judged and categorized with very little attempt to know them as real people or to understand or appreciate the gifts they have to offer.

Today's scripture reading from the Book of Samuel is also a coming of age story about a young teenage boy. It is the story of David, the youngest of eight brothers, a shepherd and, as we later find out, a musician and a poet. The prophet Samuel has been sent by God to anoint a new king, a new ruler, for the Israelites. All Samuel has been told is that this new king is a son of Jesse, a man who lives in Bethlehem. Samuel takes a heifer with him and goes in search of Jesse and his family. When he arrives Samuel invites Jesse's family to join him for the ritual sacrifice of the heifer and the feast that will follow.

When the time for the banquet arrives, Jesse begins to introduce his sons to Samuel starting with Eliab, the eldest. Samuel sees this tall, handsome man and says to himself, "Surely God's anointed stands here before YHWH." But God has other ideas and so he says to Samuel, "Pay no attention to appearance and height; I have rejected him. YHWH does not see as mortals see; mortals see only appearance but YHWH sees into the heart." Now YHWH wasn't suggesting the Eliab was a bad person, just that he wasn't the chosen one. His gifts were not what God was looking for in the next king of the Israelites. His gifts were to be used elsewhere.

Eventually seven sons are presented to Samuel but all are rejected by YHWH. So Samuel asks Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” And Jesse has to admit that the youngest, David, is still out in the pasture tending the sheep. Samuel announces that the banquet is delayed until this youngest son can join them. When David arrives, YHWH makes it clear that he is the one to be anointed. You see, YHWH doesn’t care about age or sexual orientation or ability or any of the other reasons that people are often separated or even marginalized. YHWH looks only at what is in David’s heart, at the gifts that David has been given that would make him a good leader.

We are challenged to see as YHWH sees, to ignore outward appearance and instead to see the humanity and gifts of every person. Since today’s movie is based on the life of Steven Spielberg, we are all aware that Sam does eventually follow his heart and find his true calling in the movie industry. Sam may be short in stature and challenged in sports, but he has the gift of story-telling and the eye of an artist. And those who are familiar with Steven Spielberg’s movies will also recognize that they are created with the perfect blend of art and cutting edge science. Without the science involved in special effects, we would never have experienced some of the amazing moments in Jaws, Indiana Jones, ET and many other of his blockbuster movies.

Today, on this National Affirming Sunday, on PIE day, may we recognize that diversity in humanity and in all of creation is itself a gift from God. Thomas Berry, theologian and advocate for the environment wrote, “Diversity is the magic...The greater the diversity, the greater the perfection.” And I would add, each

individual, each creature, each plant has a reason for being and something to add to the perfection of our planet and our universe. May we all have the opportunity to use the gifts that God has given us and may we recognize those gifts in every person we meet. May it be so. Amen.