

2023 03 12 –Tár

Scripture: John 4:5-42 (The Inclusive Bible)

This is the Fourth Sunday of Lent and for us that means it is also the fourth Sunday of this year's Lenten Movie Series. Each film in the series is one that was nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. Of course, the Oscars were given out last Sunday night, and, in case you missed it, *Everything, Everywhere All at Once* was the big winner with seven Oscars, including Best Picture. Today's movie, *Tár*, was nominated in several categories but did not win an Oscar this year.

Tár is a psychological drama. It is the story of a fictional character named Lydia Tár. Ms. Tár is the first female chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Near the beginning of the movie we watch as a real life reporter for the *New Yorker* magazine, Adam Gopnik, interviews Lydia in front of a large audience. He begins with a long list of her accomplishments. She is a composer as well as a conductor and has won, an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony for her work. Ms Tár has also just written a book about her life and her music and it is obvious from her answers in the interview that she is brilliant and incredibly well-spoken.

In her personal life, Lydia is married to her wife, Sharon, who is also the orchestra's concertmaster (or chief violinist). Together they have adopted a little Syrian girl named Petra. In the movie we see that Lydia and Sharon both love

their child very much. Lydia also has a personal assistant, Francesca, who deals with all the details of her crazy schedule.

In her interview, Lydia comes across as a humble woman filled with gratitude to those who have helped her achieve her fame. But it doesn't take long before we realize that Lydia is far from humble, in fact she is using her talent, her fame, her power to abuse those around her. We watch as she treats Francesca like a servant, ignoring her assistant's gifts as an aspiring conductor. We watch as she belittles the wealthy banker, and amateur conductor, who financially supports her scholarship program for young female conductors. We watch as she greets her wife after a long absence by scolding her for leaving on too many lights. We watch as she verbally attacks a young music student to the point where he can take it no longer and has to leave the room.

In one of the most disturbing scenes in the movie, at least for me, Lydia goes up to a little girl who has been bullying their daughter and, with a threatening tone, tells this little girl she is Petra's father and that she will "get her" if she ever bullies Petra again.

As the movie progresses we discover that Lydia has had illicit affairs with some of the young female conductors that her scholarship supports. We learn that she has promised these vulnerable women that she will help further their careers. One of them is now trying to reconnect with Lydia, asking for help and Lydia is choosing to ignore her desperate pleas. Eventually this young woman commits suicide and Lydia's affair is leaked to social media. Even as news of this abuse,

and others, starts to unravel her career, Lydia continues to take advantage of those around her.

What makes this movie fascinating is that Lydia is portrayed as a complicated multi-dimensional human being. It would be easy to condemn her as an abusive monster. But, as I watched the movie, I was never sure if we should be admiring her, despising her or feeling sorry for her as she begins to lose everything that matters in her life. Is she a villain or a victim or some combination of the two?

In some ways, Lydia is like the woman at the well in today's scripture reading. This Samaritan woman also seems to lead a troubled life. But, rather than being at the top of the hierarchy, like Lydia, she has ended up at the bottom. We know this, because, instead of coming for water early in the morning, with the rest of the women in her town, she comes in the heat of the noon hour sun. Jesus points out that this Samaritan woman has had five husbands and is currently living with a man who is not her husband. What we don't know is why. Yes, she has been vilified by her village, but it's very possible that she could be a victim of the patriarchal society in which she lived, a society where it was very easy for a man to divorce a barren or unfaithful wife. It's less likely, but also possible that she has chosen the lifestyle of a prostitute. We really don't know.

In the scripture reading Jesus just states the facts. He makes no judgement on the woman at the well. Instead he tells her about the "living water," that he can offer her. He says, "Those who drink the water I give them will never be thirsty, no, the water I give will become fountains within them, springing up to provide

eternal life.” Other translations say “endless life” (The Message) or “real life” (The Five Gospels). The living water that Jesus is offering is, of course, the Good News of a loving God and a kingdom of peace and justice. Living Water comes from a relationship with the sacred, the presence of the Spirit of Love in our lives. It is the promise of new life, real life, a life filled with healing and compassion.

In today’s scripture reading, the Samaritan woman recognizes that Jesus is different than the men and women who have ostracized her in her village. She sees in Jesus the promise of transformation, of a new way of being and, leaving her water jar, she goes off to tell the people of her town about the prophet, maybe even the Messiah, that she met at the well.

I wonder what would have happened if the woman at the well had been Lydia Tár. I’m afraid that Lydia, certainly the Lydia at the beginning of today’s movie, would have had nothing to do with Jesus. She would have thought that she had all the water she needed. In her mind, she was invincible, she was living on top of the world. I don’t think she realized that she was living on borrowed time, on false currency, that her tower of lies and abuse was about to fall down and all the power, fame and talent in the world couldn’t keep her life from breaking into rubble around her. That Lydia would probably have ignored Jesus.

But maybe the fallen Lydia would be have been looking for healing. If the Lydia at the end of the movie was offered living water, was offered the possibility of a new way of being, would she take it? Possibly. Hopefully.

But what if a younger Lydia, a pre-fame Lydia had met Jesus at the well? At one point Lydia would have been an aspiring young conductor, just like the girls that she took advantage of. What if Jesus had said to her, follow me, there is another way. What if that Lydia had been introduced to the living water and had realized that fame and power were false idols, false currency, that real life, true life, comes from the power of the Spirit of Love. Then what would Lydia's life have looked like?

There lots of theories on power. Some argue that, no matter who you are, power corrupts. But, about ten years ago, in a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, authors found that “people’s sense of “moral identity”—the degree to which they thought it was important to their sense of self to be “caring,” “compassionate,” “fair,” “generous” and so on—shaped their responses to feelings of power.” They argued that “power doesn’t corrupt; it heightens pre-existing ethical tendencies.” And I would argue that ethical tendencies are impacted by a relationship with a God of love. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/why-power-corrupts-37165345/>

I truly believe that Lydia Tár, like the woman at the well, like all of us, just needed someone to offer her the living water of God's love. That the knowledge that we are loved, just as we are, and that all of us are worthy of that love, just as we are, is more powerful than any success or fame that we might find through money or talent. So may all find our eternal life, our real life through living water, through the power of the Spirit of Love. May it be so. Amen.