

## 2023 03 26 – Women Talking

**Scripture: John 11:1-45** (The Inclusive Bible)

This is the Fifth Sunday of Lent and for us that means it is also the last Sunday of this year's Lenten Movie Series. Each film in our series was nominated for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. This Sunday's movie is called *Women Talking*. This film is based on a book with the same name by Miriam Toews and it was adapted for the screen and directed by Sarah Polley. Both of these women are Canadian and I'm happy to say that *Women Talking* won this year's Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay.

*Women Talking* is a drama set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this century. It is the story of an isolated religious colony where some of the men have been using a livestock tranquilizer to subdue and rape the women of the colony. These horrendous acts have resulted in injury, pregnancy, infection and even one death. These men have repeatedly raped women of all ages from young children to elderly grandmothers. The male leaders of the colony have tried to convince the women that the attacks were not real. But then one of the rapists is seen and identified and, as the film begins we find out that the attackers have been arrested and are imprisoned in a nearby city. Nearly all of the men of the colony have gone to the city to make bail and to bring the perpetrators home.

The women of the colony realize that they have a couple of days at most to decide what they are going to do. So they quickly organize a referendum, a vote. The women are given three choices: do nothing, stay and fight, or leave. After all

the women in the colony have voted the results are displayed. We can see that a few have voted to do nothing, but the vast majority have voted for action. The problem is that there is a tie between the two active choices: stay and fight, or leave. So a small group of women is elected. This group will make the final decision. This small group gather in the loft of one of the barns. And it is then that the women begin to talk.

The women talk about the pros and cons of each choice. None of these women have been taught to read or write; on their colony only the boys go to school. So the women invite the male schoolteacher, who has remained behind, to act as their minute-taker. He keeps the lists and writes down their conversations. They talk about their faith and the fact that, before he left, the leader of their colony told the women that they had to forgive their attackers or they would never get to the kingdom of heaven. For these women, forgiveness means “doing nothing,” and that option has already been ruled out.

As they talk, these women, who have been abused and oppressed all their lives begin to unlearn their oppression. They start to wonder if the words of their spiritual leader are really the words of God. For the first time in their lives they allow themselves to imagine a different reality. At one point, while they are discussing the possibility of staying and fighting, one of the participants says,

But what would that mean to us? Perhaps we need a statement that describes what we want the colony to be like after winning the fight.

Perhaps we need to understand more what it is we are fighting to achieve,

not only what we are fighting to destroy.

<https://www.moviequotesandmore.com/women-talking-quotes/>

And then she goes on to describe her own version of the kingdom of heaven on earth, a place where

“men and women would make all the decisions for the colony collectively.

Women would be allowed think. Girls would be taught to read and to write.... A new religion taken from the old, but focused on love, would be created by the women of the colony. Our children would be safe.

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These women are imagining the possibility of resurrection, of transformation, of new life. They are imagining the possibility of freedom from violence and oppression. They are imagining a world where their daughters would be safe and their sons would be taught a different way of being in the world.

But they are also aware that this new vision will not come without sacrifice. They are aware that there is much they will have to let go of in order to move forward.

As they consider the option of leaving, the women struggle with the idea of never seeing their older sons, their husbands, their brothers and their fathers again.

They struggle with the idea of leaving the only life they have ever known. They struggle with the idea of venturing forth into a world they know nothing about.

Today’s scripture reading is also about letting go and the possibility that comes with new life. Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus, is ill and dies before Jesus can

reach him. In fact, by the time Jesus arrives Lazarus has already been dead for four days. Jesus is moved by the grief of Lazarus' sisters and the other mourners and he joins them in their tears. But Jesus has come knowing that Lazarus will be resurrected, that he will be transformed, that he will rise from death. Despite Martha's worry about the stench, Jesus orders that the stone on Lazarus' tomb be taken away. And then Jesus calls in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus walks from the tomb covered in the linen strips that he had been buried in and Jesus says, "Untie him and let him go free."

This week, Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote about Lazarus' resurrection, in a piece he called, "For Lazarus to Rise." He wrote:

When Lazarus heard his name  
he took a sudden breath.  
With visceral trembling blood resurged.  
But then, as when awakening some days,  
he lay a moment, mired,  
reluctant to rise from the familiar  
swaddling of his death.  
Rising, even more than dying,  
there could be no return:  
for if he chose to stand,  
all he knew would then be lost

And still now every morning,  
each momentary wish for healing  
is a risk, a wakening call  
to change, to choose,  
to be again made new,  
and leave so much behind.

[www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net)

Garnaas-Holmes imagines that, like the women in the barn, like all of us when we are faced with change, Lazarus struggled with the idea of leaving "the familiar swaddling of his death." Even when we are abused, even when we are

oppressed, even when we know our current situation will only get worse, it's hard to let go of what is familiar. It's hard to imagine beyond the only life we have known.

It doesn't matter if we are a young mother in an abusive relationship, a gay teenager hiding in the closet, an addict hooked on drugs, a middle-aged man stuck in a dead-end job, or a faith community reluctant to move beyond the status quo. It's hard to take that first step towards new life. It's hard to change even when our current situation is a place of spiritual, emotional, mental or even physical death.

In our movie, the group of women do make a decision to act, but we are not told how their lives are changed afterwards. In today's gospel reading, Lazarus does leave the tomb, but we are not told how he is transformed once the linen cloths are removed. When we make decisions for new life the outcome is never guaranteed. There is never any way of knowing what the final transformation will be.

What we do know is that resurrection is only possible when death is allowed to happen, when we are willing to let go of that which is holding us back. What we do know is that the possibility of new life comes from the Spirit of Love, the Sacred Love within each and every one of us. What we do know is that God is with us and we are not alone even when making the most difficult decisions of our lives. May we have the faith and the courage to allow resurrection to take place in our lives, in our community and in our world. May it be so. Amen.