

2024 03 10 – *Barbie*

Scripture: John 3:14-21 (*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 at this time, we go on a pilgrimage through popular cinema in order to theologically explore some of the movies that have been nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards.

Today, we will be discussing a movie that most of you have heard about, even if you haven't seen it. It is, of course, *Barbie*.

Barbie is a fantasy and a comedy based on the fashion dolls first sold by Mattel back in 1959. There have been over 250 different iterations of this doll sold around the world over the past sixty-five years. How many of you played with Barbie dolls or bought Barbie dolls for your children, grandchildren or other younger relatives? So most of us are familiar with Barbie.

This movie is set in Barbieland, a plastic world with buildings and landscaping based on the many accessories that have been sold with Barbie dolls over the years. It is, of course, very pink. Barbieland is populated by different versions of Barbies and Kens. We watch as they go about their days in their plastic world with no real water, fire or earth. We watch as they dance, sing and receive awards. It all seems quite idyllic. Every day Stereotypical Barbie says, "It is the best day ever. So was yesterday and so is tomorrow and everyday from now until forever."

But soon it becomes obvious all is not well in Barbieland. We discover that this is a matriarchal society where the Barbies hold prestigious jobs in law, science, politics and so on, while the Kens spend their days playing at the beach. It seems that Beach Ken's happiness, his whole identity is dependent on his relationship with Stereotypical Barbie. And there are also the discontinued models, the Barbies that got taken off the shelves quickly (like solitary Allan, Pregnant Barbie, Video Barbie, Growing Up Skipper or Earring Magic Ken.) These unconventional Barbies are treated like outcasts by their more popular neighbours.

One evening something very strange happens: Stereotypical Barbie begins to think about death. Overnight she develops bad breath, a hint of cellulite and flat feet. She is no longer happy, carefree, perfect Barbie.

So she seeks out Weird Barbie. Weird Barbie is definitely my favourite character in this movie. She is the Barbie that many of us can relate to. The Barbie whose hair gets chopped by scissors that are barely sharp enough to cut. The Barbie whose face is disfigured by a permanent marker. The Barbie whose limbs are distorted or loosened to the point where she is constantly doing the splits. Weird Barbie lives in an unusual Barbie house in a remote corner of Barbieland. And she surrounds herself with other marginalized characters.

Weird Barbie is what Henri Nouwen would call a "wounded healer." He wrote, "When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers." Weird Barbie has obviously reached that point in her life and the other Barbies have come to recognize her

wisdom and her skill. You could even go so far as to call her the “Jesus” figure in Barbieland. <https://bookroo.com/quotes/the-wounded-healer>

Which leads us to today’s scripture, a scripture passage that contains the famous verse, John 3:16 “Yes, God so loved the world, as to give the Only Begotten One, that whoever believes may not die but have eternal life.” And that verse is followed by, “God sent the Only Begotten into the world not to condemn the world, but that through the Only Begotten the world might be saved.” This particular translation, the Inclusive Bible, uses the phrase “the Only Begotten,” to refer to Jesus. So these verses are saying that God loves the world so much that God sent Jesus that the world might be saved.

But what does it mean to be saved? For me, the word salvation is about healing: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual healing. In the movie *Weird Barbie* tells Stereotypical Barbie that, in order for her to be healed, she must go to the real world and find the child that is playing with her there.

So Barbie with Ken, a stow-away in her car, heads off to the real world. Of course, they soon discover that the real world is nothing like Barbieland. It is a patriarchal world filled with greed, lust, pride and all the other vices. Barbie is shocked to discover that this world does not consider her to be the perfect role model for little girls. In fact, it is her unnatural perfection that is the problem.

When Stereotypical Barbie finally meets the girl who played with her, it is the girl’s mother who explains to Barbie,

It is literally impossible to be a woman. You are so beautiful, and so smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough. Like, we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow we're always doing it wrong.

You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean...

...You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too hard! It's too contradictory and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you! And it turns out in fact that not only are you doing everything wrong, but also everything is your fault.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/america-ferrera-monologue-barbie-movie-b2381963.html>

Barbie's salvation, Barbie's healing process, is no different than the rest of us. Whether we are a Barbie or a Ken—wherever we reside on the gender continuum—we all have to accept that real life in the real world is not perfect. For Stereotypical Barbie, it is figuring out that mortality, cellulite and flat feet are not the issue. For the rest of us it is loving and accepting ourselves just as we are. None of us are perfect; we don't live in pink, plastic Barbieland. We should not expect perfection from ourselves or others.

What we are called to do is love ourselves, in all our messiness, just as God loves us. What we are called to do is turn to the Holy Mystery, believe in the Ground of our Being and accept the healing that comes from the Essence of Love. May we all, like Barbie, figure out that Eternal Life is not so much about living forever, but rather about living as deeply and fully as we can each day of our finite lives. It is about living in the infinite and eternal grace of Sacred Love.