

## 2024 03 17 – *The Holdovers*

**Scripture:** John 12:20-33 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Here we are at the Fifth Sunday of Lent and thus the fifth and final movie in our Lenten Movie Series. Every year at this time, we go on this pilgrimage through popular cinema in order to theologically explore some of the movies that have been nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. As we all know by now, this year's Oscar winning picture was the first movie that we discussed, *Oppenheimer*. *Oppenheimer* was the big winner of the night with a total of seven Oscars. The movie that we are exploring today was nominated five times and won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. It is called *The Holdovers*.

*The Holdovers* is a combination comedy and drama. It is set in the early 1970's at Barton Academy, an all-male boarding school in New England. The film has three main characters: Paul Hunham, a classics professor at the boarding school, Angus Tully, a student and Mary Lamb, the head cook. This unlikely threesome end up spending time together over Christmas when they are the only people, the only holdovers, along with the custodian, remaining on campus during the holidays.

Early in the film we discover that Professor Hunham is a cantankerous, strict and much-hated teacher at Barton Academy. He has a very negative view on life which he illustrates with pungent lines like, "life is like a henhouse ladder, shitty and short." Hunham's negative view of the world spills out into the way that he treats his students. In fact, the reason that he is stuck with "babysitting" duties

over the holidays is because the headmaster is punishing him for refusing to give a major donor's son a better grade.

Mary is struggling with their own issues. She has recently lost her only child. He was a handsome intelligent young man who should have gone to college. But, because Mary couldn't afford the college fees, her son ended up in Vietnam where he was killed in active duty. Mary is filled with the pain of her grief.

Angus, our third character, is a troubled young man who has been expelled from several boarding schools and, if this one doesn't work out, his parents have threatened to send him to a military academy instead. Angus is stuck at school because, at the last minute, his mother cancelled his ticket to their family vacation in St. Kitts. She decided that a "honeymoon" with her new husband was more important than spending time with her son over Christmas.

So the movie begins with three sad, lonely, troubled people who are thrust together for several days over the Christmas holidays. Each of them living lives that are currently filled with darkness.

One of the reasons this film works as well as it does is because their pain is so accessible. It is easy for us to relate to the emotions that they are feeling: the grief, the disappointment, the rejection, the sadness, the loneliness, the despair. We've all been in similar places at different points in our own lives. And many of us have also felt the heightened emotions that appear at holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other special times of the year.

One of those special times is, of course, our upcoming Easter holiday. That time of year when families gather to eat rich food and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Of course, too often we forget that the new life that comes with the empty tomb is not possible without the death and darkness of Good Friday. This is what Jesus is explaining to his disciples in today's scripture passage from the Gospel of John. Today's reading takes place in Jerusalem during Jesus' final week.

Knowing that his death is imminent, Jesus says,

Now the hour has come  
for the Chosen One to be glorified.  
The truth of the matter is,  
unless a grain of wheat  
falls on the ground and dies,  
it remains only a single grain;  
but if it dies,  
it yields a rich harvest."

There are times in our lives when we have to let go of something we love, something we think we need, something that may be holding us back.

Sometimes we have to let some part of us die in order for new life, abundant life to be possible. And like the seed that lies in the ground, our times of growth, of transformation often occur in dark places. They can be a painful, lonely and even fearful times.

In order for new life to occur, the seed in the ground needs the warmth of the sun, the nutrients in the soil and moisture from the rain. In order for us to heal and grow, we also need to be fed and nurtured. We need to know that we are not alone, that we are loved.

In *The Holdovers* we watch as Professor Hunham, Angus and Mary begin to open up to each other and even care for each other. We watch as they support each other and provide the nutrients needed for growth and transformation to occur. We watch and we laugh as they go on a road trip to Boston where they discover new truths about themselves and each other. We watch and we cry as they take the steps needed to begin the process of letting go and discovering the possibility of new life.

Professor Hunham begins to dream about finishing the book that he has always wanted to write. Mary visits her pregnant sister and recognizes that this unborn child is a sign of promise and possibility. Angus works through some of his issues with his family and is able to begin a new chapter in his life.

As you think of the dark times that have occurred in your own lives, I invite you to identify the sources of love and compassion that helped you. Was it something or someone that led you to a deeper connection to the Sacred? Was it a family member who held you when you needed it? Was it a friend who provided support through a hard time? Did you go to a counsellor or therapist, a doctor or other helping professional? Did you read stories of others who had gone through the same kind of pain? When we are hurting we all need to know that we are not alone. We all need to know that this too will end and that new life is possible.

This is the promise of Easter, this is the reassurance that Jesus was giving his disciples, this is the story of love that is Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus believed that his death was necessary in order for his life's ministry to continue.

He believed that his death would lead to a rich harvest of people who would hear the Good News of God's love and continue his work of transforming themselves and the world.

We are called to be that harvest. We are called to let die what needs to die in order for new life to occur. We called to build God's reign of peace and justice on this earth.

May we all be a part of that transformation.

May it be so. Amen.